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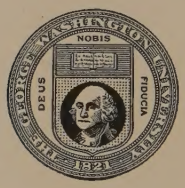

The Civil Service

SOME HUMAN ASPECTS

WITHDRAWAL

The Civil Service

SOME HUMAN ASPECTS

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PREFACE

I HAVE been asked to make it clear that I have no official backing for this book, that the opinions in it are my own and that they are very much opinions. This I do gladly.

Perhaps I should also explain that I have not tried to deal with the history of the civil service or with its considerable achievements; these have been more than adequately described elsewhere. I have not been able to deal, either, with industrial civil servants, the specialist grades, the scientific civil service or the manipulative and engineering grades of the Post Office. It seemed to me that I might much more usefully concentrate on the desk workers in the administrative, executive and clerical classes, and particularly on those who, as a rule, have most to do with the public.

Something of what this means in terms of the numbers, salaries, etc., of the officials dealt with is shown in the Appendices, where readers who are not familiar with the service will find notes on the main classes of civil servants and charts showing roughly how Government Departments and the branches within them are staffed and organised. Such readers may wish to glance first at the Appendices and then read Chapter V, and possibly Chapter VIII, before turning to the chapters which deal with the recruitment, deployment and conditioning of civil servants and their relations with various groups outside the service.

In these, rather more detailed, chapters I have given a good deal of prominence to the middle-grade civil servant. I make no apology for this: he is an important and extremely influential person, and he has not been looked at in quite this way before. I have done my best to show him 'in the round'; and if this has meant, here and there, going more

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than once over the same ground I must take refuge in Donne's contention that,

> On a huge hill
> Cragged and steep truth stands, and he that will
> Reach her about must and about must go
> And what the hill's suddenness resists win so.

Not that I would claim to have discerned—much less distilled—the whole truth about the groups of officials I have described. That would have been something quite beyond my powers—even if I had been free to attempt it. I have merely done my best to paint them roughly as I see them. If the portrait seems, at times, highly coloured, I can only assert, in words used in the same context by a great man who was—but did not remain—a civil servant, 'I am sure it is substantially just and the colouring, like that in the microscope slides of dissections, only put in to make it intelligible'.

My thanks are due to those who have read the book in draft and in proof and helped me to avoid many pitfalls.

F. D.

January, 1956.

CONTENTS

PREFACE page v

I *Recruitment*
page 9

II *Deployment*
page 23

III *Conditioning*
page 47

IV *Methods*
page 69

V *The Total Personality*
page 95

VI *Civil Servants and Parliament*
page 119

VII *Relations with the Law and the Organised Public*
page 142

VIII *The Unorganised Public*
page 165

IX *Summing Up*
page 194

APPENDICES
page 217

CHAPTER I

Recruitment

It is the intention of this study to look at civil servants, not so much as members of an organisation, responsible, through Ministers, to Parliament, but as individuals, influencing from day to day the lives of people outside the service. For this purpose it will be necessary to look behind the curtain of appearances and to examine—with no mischievous or scurrilous intention, but with a view to understanding what is and what is not to be expected—the real lives of the men and women who are at present civil servants, and the influences and pressures which have helped to form them—and to which they are still subject. Statistics and structural charts will not take us very far in an enquiry of this kind, though they will often provide a useful starting point; and the outcome of our investigations will frequently prove to be stimulating to the imagination rather than satisfying to the intellect. We shall pose questions but not always provide answers; and we shall start more hares than we can possibly run down.

Thus, in considering at the outset the recruitment of civil servants, we shall concentrate not so much on structural analysis as on some of the more difficult questions relating to the social and educational background of civil servants of various grades. We shall deal in this way not only with the corps d'élite at the summit of the service, but with the equally interesting middle grades and with the 'broad masses' of the clerical classes. And we shall try to present, not so much a snapshot as a time exposure, covering the period in which the present population of the service has been recruited.

The theoretical basis of recruitment to the home civil service, as it has existed in recent years, is well known, at least in outline. It has been described in a number of excellent books and the account has recently been brought up-to-date in the Introductory Factual Memorandum submitted by the Treasury to the recent Royal Commission on the Civil Service, as well as by the evidence of the staff associations before the Commission. The Memorandum is well worth reading, and the figures taken from it and produced in Appendix One of the present book show how the numbers of the 270,000 or so desk workers with whom we shall be mainly concerned compare with those of the grades we have had to leave out. The Memorandum also shows, very briefly, what each of the grades is paid, what its hours are and what it is supposed to do. Some of these details are reproduced in Appendices Three, Four, Five and Six. Recruitment is also dealt with in the Memorandum, and the picture that at first emerges is that of a system designed to correspond, broadly speaking, with the human material provided by our current educational processes—an administrative cadre at the top, taking its full share of, if not skimming, the cream of the universities; an executive corps in the middle, deriving its entrants from the sixth forms of the secondary grammar schools; a large clerical staff composed of the less distinguished products of the same schools, and sub-clerical officers from the secondary modern and technical schools. The age of entry is seen to be adjusted to the leaving ages of schools and colleges. The administrators come in in their early twenties, the executives between seventeen and a half and nineteen, the clericals between sixteen and eighteen, and the others even younger.

Selection, we are told, is by open competition, involving written and in some cases oral tests, the latter declining in scope and importance as one moves down the pyramid. For instance, a young man joining the administrative class straight from a university will have two interviews, each of considerable importance, even if he does not choose the 'Stoke D'Abernon' method, which involves much more prolonged tests of personal qualities as well as a final

interview. A young executive will have one interview at the most. A young clerical officer will have none.

This simple picture has its uses, but it also has dangers—even as a starting point for studies chiefly concerned with the formal structure of the service or the processes whereby civil servants are able to give advice to Ministers. For a study of the present kind it is particularly defective, since it focuses altogether too much attention on the direct entrants to the various classes and ignores the devices that have actually been used to assemble the existing population of the service over the last half century. It lends colour, too, to the misconceived view that the public service is a place of straight lines and clear divisions where some neatly packaged substance known as Policy is manufactured by a small corps of ubiquitous amateurs, who know next to nothing about almost everything, and strictly applied, by clerks and others, under the day to day direction of members of the executive class.

The real picture, which underlies the myth, is, as we shall see, rather more complicated; and in a study of the present kind, which is less concerned with bold decisions of far-reaching significance—in so far as these ever do take place within the service—than with a multitude of habitual and apparently insignificant actions and states of mind, it is important that we should see this underlying picture clearly. We shall find it not so much a matter of clean lines as of shading and atmosphere, and we shall have to be content to build up our impressions of it slowly as we go along. We shall find that, among other things, it shifts our attention from direct entrants to the administrative class down towards some of those, particularly the older and more senior executives, who have entered earlier and by other doors.

Students and critics of the service have hitherto shown little disposition to look below the surface in this way. Much has been said and written about the qualities and capacities of the two or three thousand administrators who occupy posts at the summit of the service, and in general the arguments of friends and enemies have been based almost

exclusively on the merits and shortcomings of the direct entrants to the class, recruited at a tender age straight from the universities. Very often, too, they have concentrated much of their attention on the effects of fairly recent changes in systems of recruitment.

It is, of course, interesting to note that, in 1953, for instance, out of fifty-two successful candidates in the administrative class competition, twenty-six came from Oxford, fifteen from Cambridge, five from the Scottish universities, five from London and one from Nottingham. And it is useful to know that thirty-five of the fifty-two were educated at grammar schools, that twelve came from 'working class homes' (seven of them via Oxford or Cambridge), seventeen from parents described as 'small shop-keepers, insurance clerks, primary school teachers, etc.', and twenty-three from professional or comparable homes. But these young people are as yet mere cadets, of not the least significance so far as the present performance of the service is concerned. If we want to know how the service behaves at present—or even how these people will themselves behave in ten, twenty, or thirty years' time, we must begin by looking at the characteristics of the collection of people they have joined. By the time they reach positions of influence, the twelve young people from working class homes and the seventeen from the lowest middle classes will have been subject for a considerable period to influences very different from those of their parents or their home background. The structure into which these young people will eventually be assimilated is described in general terms in the Factual Memorandum as follows:

'The Permanent Secretary is the official head of the Department and is responsible to the Minister for all the activities of his Department. He will be assisted by one or two deputy secretaries. Below this there will be from four to twelve under secretaries carrying responsibility for advising Ministers either directly or through their supervisors on major questions of policy and, as a rule co-ordinating very large blocks of administrative work. Each under secretary will be assisted by a varying number of assistant secretaries

in operational control of divisions and carrying responsibility for all day-to-day work done in the division. It is only questions of major policy that should normally be referred above this level. Each assistant secretary is supported by from two to five or six principals or senior executive staff, each of whom will be in charge of a branch or section of a division. He will in his turn be supported by a varying number of executive and clerical staff. Assistant principals form a training grade.'

So much for the structure, which is set out in diagrammatic form in Appendices Seven and Eight of this book. It is now time to turn to the individuals who have found their way into its various niches.

The first thing we notice when we look at the present members of the administrative class is that nearly half of them did not enter it direct from a university. Some came in from business during the war, and many are former executives who have entered the class by promotion. And within this latter group are a number who were never at secondary schools and who entered the service as clerks straight from elementary schools or by way of the special examinations for ex-service men after the 1914-18 War. According to the Central Staff Record, there were, on 1st July, 1953, 1,248, of a total of 2,597, administrators who had entered the administrative ranks from another class. They included eight of the thirty-four Permanent Secretaries, twenty-one of sixty-eight deputy secretaries, eighty-five of 217 under-secretaries, 364 of 703 assistant secretaries and no less than 723 of 1,281 principals. Furthermore, of some 380 persons promoted to the rank of assistant secretary in the years 1948 to 1953 inclusive, less than half were direct entrants to the class, while in the same period only 331 out of 699 persons promoted to the rank of principal were direct entrants.

The next thing one notices is that rather more than half of the administrators are over forty years of age and that a number of them are over sixty. The following figures show the age distribution of the administrative staff in the civil service (including Branch A of the Foreign Service) on 1st January, 1955:

age	*men*	*women*
20–24	69	23
25–29	282	25
30–34	383	32
35–39	558	37
40–44	507	24
45–49	376	26
50–54	290	21
55–59	438	8
60 and over	200	1

If we wish to form some idea of the educational and social origins of these men and women we must go back, in the case of the 500 or so now in their early forties, to the lean years of the 1930's, and in the case of those over fifty to the period immediately following the First World War. We must see them against a social background very different from that of today, and as products of an educational system much more clearly stratified than the one we are at present developing. We must remember also that some of the oldest and most senior men had their formal education interrupted by the 1914–18 War and that a number of them must have left their elementary school, at the age of thirteen or fourteen some forty years ago. These people have been educated largely within the service, and we shall see later how it has moulded them and fostered their loyalties to each other—and to itself.

It is perhaps worth looking at the age distribution in some detail. In July, 1953, eleven of the thirty-four men at Permanent Secretary level were sixty or over. Only nine were born in the present century. Twenty-two out of sixty-eight under secretaries and 212 members of the class as a whole were sixty or over. Of these latter, 144 were entrants from other classes, the great majority of whom must have finished their formal education some forty-five years ago.

These figures show that it is wrong to think of the administrative civil service as comprising an officer class recruited solely, or mainly, from the older universities. If it is an officer class at all—and we shall consider this analogy more fully later—it is one with as many Warrant

Officers as Dartmouth entrants—and one which acquires many of its members when they are decidedly long in the tooth. This means, among other things, that our administrators are less amateurs and more specialists, less innocent and more case-hardened, less academic and more empirical than they, and some of their critics, would, now and again, have us believe. They include, apart from a few war-time additions, two quite distinct groups, which have rubbed shoulders and reacted on each other, not unhealthily, over the years; and it is interesting to note that many of the pre-war and war-time critics of the higher civil service were storming a citadel which many of their own men had already entered—albeit somewhat disguised and by a side door.

The efforts of these critics are now, oddly enough, just beginning to produce a third type, consisting of young men, whether from inside the service or from the universities, selected by the method to which Stoke D'Abernon has given its name. These young people are required to be of, at least, second class honours degree standard and to show a certain capacity for performing academic tasks, but they are primarily required, in Joseph Conrad's words, 'to have Ability in the abstract and to demonstrate it practically' in a series of tests of personal qualities. The subjects of this experiment have still to prove themselves, and their numbers are small as yet, but they, and indeed all the reconstruction entrants brought in soon after the war, who interposed a period in the forces between the university and the public service, are likely to throw even further off the scent those who are prone to think of the upper strata of the service as being composed of people straight from the atmosphere of Oxford or Cambridge.

When we look more closely at the executive ranks we find a similarly blurred picture so far as recruitment and educational origins are concerned and an even greater crowding in the higher age groups. The executives, whose duties are described with accuracy, if not precision, in the Treasury's Factual Memorandum as 'lying between those of the clerical class and the administrative class', comprise, with comparable departmental classes, rather less than 64,000 people.

There are about twenty executives, in other words, to every one administrator. In 1952, the latest year for which detailed figures are to be had, some two-thirds of the vacancies in the basic grades of the executive class were filled by promotion, mainly from the clerical grades. A further 11·5 per cent. of these vacancies were filled by examinations limited to members of the clerical and similar classes and the remaining 23 per cent. were filled by open competition.

Most of the successful candidates in the 'open' examinations were young people between seventeen and a half and nineteen, but a number of places were reserved for graduates, national service men and ex-regulars. This pattern, which dates from 1948, follows a round of reconstruction examinations and a war-time period when entry by examination was suspended and a large number of posts in an expanding service had to be filled by promotion from the clerical classes. It is fairly generally agreed that, here and there, the service is still suffering from dilution that took place in this period.

It is misleading, then, to think of the executive class as being composed in the main of people representing the flower of the grammar schools. Its ranks do indeed contain many people who distinguished themselves in the sixth forms of their secondary schools, and this is particularly true of those who were driven into the service by the prevailing economic climate and the lack of outside opportunities in the late thirties.

But its ranks also include people who are not quite up to the standard of some immediate pre-war entrants, educationally or intellectually, and in whose hands the 'day to day conduct of public business within the framework of established policy' is neither expeditiously nor confidently conducted.

The age distribution of the executives is as interesting as that of the administrators. Nearly half of them are over fifty, and, of the 53,474 men of this class in post on 1st January, 1955, 18,505 were fifty-five or over. These older executives must have had almost all their schooling before the First World War, and many of them will have come into the service as clerks in the round of examinations that

followed the armistice. All their adult lives will have been spent in the service, the first fifteen or twenty years in conditions of stagnation or contraction, when promotion was exceedingly hard to come by and there was little scope for the exercise of initiative or imagination. They are far removed, temperamentally and culturally, from the young people who were sitting the executive examinations shortly before the war, just as these are themselves distinguishable from the boys and girls who are coming in from the secondary schools today.

Another feature of the executive class which is not obvious from the simple triangular pattern familiar to outsiders is the considerable hierarchy that exists within the class. The executive officer, at £290 to £800 a year, is far removed from the executive heads of major establishments, of whom there are twenty-two, earning up to £2,500 a year. And, in between, there are, in the general executive class alone, some 700 chief executive officers, all of whom may well be given work from time to time which is near-administrative in character. It is these people, many of them in their late fifties, who serve as a link with the administrative class. The two groups are, as we shall see, in daily, even hourly consultation, and it is by no means always the administrators who, in practice, have the last word. These older executives are very similar, by origin, training and temperament, to the members of their class who have seeped through into the administrative ranks. But they provide a sharp contrast to the younger administrators, particularly those straight from the universities. There is much more of the sergeant-major than the subaltern about them, and their influence is, generally speaking, steadying rather than inspiring.

Looked at in detail, the age distribution of the executives is seen to reflect the course of recruitment over the last half century. If we consider only the general executive class, as distinct from the departmental classes, for which figures are less readily available, we find that some 16,000 out of 36,000 are fifty or over, and that another 10,000 are thirty-five or under. There is a shortage in the middle age groups which derives from the lean years between the wars when little

recruiting was going on. There are 6,500 of these people in the age group 31–35 and 7,000 in the 55–59 group, whereas in the 41–45 group there are less than 4,200 and in the 45–49 group some 3,370. Among the higher executive officers there is the same thinness in the late thirties and forties, but this time most of the crowding takes place in the 55–59 age group, which has some 2,500 members, as against only 1,000 or so in the 35–39 group. Among senior executive officers, one step further up the hierarchy, the weight of seniority is even more apparent. Of a total of 2,753, more than 2,000 are over fifty.

We shall have to consider very carefully, later on, this group of older and more senior executives, carrying great weight in the inner councils of the service and closely allied in many ways to the non-graduate half of the administrative class—a group of men who were at school with Kipps and Mr. Polly, completed their formal education before the First World War and were in many cases rescued from the wilderness and afforded a late harvest of promotion by the Second. Many of them were clerical officers fifteen years ago. In ten years they will have left the service. But in the meantime they are the fulcrum on which it turns. When they depart, the younger university-trained administrators, the men of Stoke D'Abernon and the vanguard of the younger executives will doubtless dispute the succession. But, for the moment, influence, if not power, is in their hands, and it is they, more than any other group, who give the service its heavy, responsible and quite inimitable flavour.

Recruitment among the clericals has, with certain divergencies, followed the executive pattern. The class is a very large one, containing over 100,000 people, some 37,000 of them women. The pattern of recruitment to it in 1952 was as follows:

	Per cent.
Open competition	
(*a*) Young people	37·5
(*b*) Ex-National Service	4·5
(*c*) Ex-Regular	6·4
Limited competition	15·8
Promotion	35·8

The limited competition was open to members of the 'minor and manipulative' grades (Post Office sorters, paper-keepers and similar people) between the ages of twenty-five and thirty, and the third of the vacancies filled by promotion was dealt with 'by departmental selection from among established clerical assistants—still mainly women—and members of the typing grades; and to a very limited extent from certain manipulative grades in the Post-Office, from paper-keepers, messengers and other similar grades, and from departmental sub-clerical grades'.

The most important feature of post-war recruitment to the clerical class, however, has been the establishment of temporary clerks—men and women taken on, without examination, during, or directly after, the Second World War. There were a number of reviews based on departmental selection, and by early 1949 some 13,500 had been selected. Another similar review later yielded a further 14,000, and during 1950 some 10,500 more were selected by a simple form of examination. Here we have 38,000 men and women of widely varying types, selected by quite abnormal methods —or at least by methods which bear no relation to the theoretical pattern which we drew at the beginning of this chapter.

A further breach in the theoretical pattern is disclosed by the reference in the Treasury Memorandum to two experimental methods of recruitment to the clerical ranks which were introduced in 1953. These involve, in the first instance, the recruitment of young people between the ages of sixteen and eighteen who have passed the General Certificate of Education at the ordinary or advanced level in certain subjects, notably English. To quote the Memorandum: 'Recruits are selected on the basis of these qualifications and with no further examination. In the event of there being more candidates than vacancies an order of merit is worked out on the basis of marks obtained in English and, if necessary, mathematics, in the General Certificate of Education.' The second experimental method consists of the offer of clerical officer vacancies to a limited number of candidates in the boys' and girls' executive competition who are within the clerical competition age limits and have just failed to reach

executive standard. These expedients, and the practical difficulties sometimes experienced in getting boys and girls from the provinces to come and fill posts in London, suggest that the civil service is no longer in the happy position it enjoyed before the war, when there was a steady flow of good-quality entrants of matriculation standard coming into the service from the grammar schools, and they suggest, too, that the pattern of recruitment to the clerical class that was beginning to take shape before the war is not likely to be speedily resumed.

The large numbers of clericals brought in by abnormal means following the First and Second World Wars and the flow of promotees, in from the minor and manipulative and clerical assistant grades and out into the executive grades, make it difficult to draw firm conclusions from the age structure of the class. But the figures, which are given in full below, show the same erosion in the middle groups and the same bulges in the early thirties and at fifty and over as were noted in the case of the executives:

	Number on 1st January 1955	
age	*men*	*women*
Under 20	1,221	1,647
20–24	3,507	4,290
25–29	6,339	4,432
30–34	11,818	6,211
35–39	9,970	4,562
40–44	8,045	3,998
45–49	6,992	4,241
50–54	6,716	3,936
55–59	10,562	2,825
60 and over	8,167	886
Total	73,337	37,028

It will be seen that after fifty-five there is a sudden drop in the proportion of women to men. This reflects, among other things, the fact that it was not until some time after the 1914–18 War that the clerical grades were opened to women. There is a similar drop in the figures for the non-industrial civil service as a whole, and these figures, which

are given below, show also the remarkable reversal of the proportions of men to women that takes place in the mid-twenties:

	Number on 1st January, 1955	
age	*men*	*women*
Under 20	6,387	11,449
20–24	13,121	21,305
25–29	25,820	15,489
30–34	48,348	17,410
35–39	46,043	12,123
40–44	47,055	12,138
45–49	41,296	12,693
50–54	39,738	13,427
55–59	60,005	11,265
60 and over	30,866	3,711
Total	358,679	131,010

With these figures we have travelled as far as we need, for the purposes of the present study, into the jungle of civil servant recruitment. We have not considered in detail the sub-clerical classes, nor have we dealt with the Foreign Service or the Post Office, where the arrangements are somewhat different. And we have not considered the recruitment pattern of the professional, scientific and technical staffs—though we shall have something to say about their relations with the other classes in another chapter. But none of these classes or groups is essential to the picture we are setting out to draw, which is primarily concerned with the relations of members of the service, at various levels and in various capacities, with the public and their authorised and unauthorised representatives.

What we have learned can be summarised in a few sentences. The great preponderance of important posts in the part of the service we have examined is filled, not by open competition but by selection from within. In many cases the examination, if any, through which the person concerned entered the service bears no relation to the post he now occupies. Almost half the administrative posts and possibly two-thirds of the executive and clerical posts appear to have been filled in this way. A very great proportion

of the promotees are men now in their early sixties or late fifties who left school early, were recruited in a period centred about the First World War and have grown up with the service. There is also a much younger group of men and women, for the most part of grammar school origin, which entered the service straight from school in the 1930's and is now making its way up the pyramid by way of internal selection and promotion. Both these 'concealed' forces will have to be considered very carefully, along with the better known group of entrants from the universities and the small band of Stoke D'Abernon products, as we pursue our investigations.

For the moment, the effect of this initial exercise has been to shift our attention downward in point of rank and backward in point of time. It has also served to show that it is by no means proper to assume that the modern civil service has been wholly, or mainly, assembled by open competition. We are in the presence of a new kind of patronage, operated, as we shall see, from within the service.

CHAPTER II

Deployment

We have seen, in general terms, how the present population of the home civil service has been assembled over the years. It is time to see how, and by what methods, it is deployed—if such a word can be applied to the disposition of the various units one is accustomed to think of as the civil service. The loose and somewhat untidy arrangement of the departments that make up the service and of the classes and grades within them is a reminder of the fact that it is only in the present century that the building of a unified service has made any considerable progress; and it will be seen, as we proceed, that it is by no means certain that the powers of the Treasury to enforce and hasten this process, though subtly and intelligently exercised, are sufficient to combat the persistent centrifugal force exerted by the departments. The organisation of the service is 'still a-repairing, ever out of frame', adjusting itself from time to time, and being adjusted, to the pressures of public affairs and to the needs and desires of bodies and persons who are in a position to bring influence to bear upon it—and in the arguments between the Treasury and the departments, between the official and staff sides of the Whitley Councils and between the Establishment and other branches of the various offices, there are no fixed havens or permanent frontiers. One is describing not a structure but a process—or rather a number of continuing and interlocking, but in some senses quite separate, processes.

At the centre of many of these stands the Treasury—a small department, as will be seen from Appendix Two, but an immensely important one; and it is to this central

position, as much as to its control of the purse-strings, and far more than to any specific legislative powers, that the Treasury owes such ability as it has to shape and deploy the 744,000 or so people who make up the non-industrial civil service. This Treasury influence in staff matters—control would perhaps be too strong a word—is exercised spasmodically and piecemeal, partly because of the patchwork character of the statutory and prerogative powers which the Treasury enjoys, partly because it is, in relation to the people it has to control, a very small department, and partly for other reasons. The position of the small band of senior and extremely able officials who are concerned with these matters in the Treasury is rather like that of a few volunteers called upon, rather late, to deal with a bush fire. They can ride up and down, covering a great deal of ground and keeping the flames in check, but it is perhaps open to question whether they could be said to be fully in control of the situation.

One of the Treasury's difficulties in this field is that, while it has always been in a position, by virtue of its financial control, to exercise some influence on staffing, and while its powers to fix complements are, in some cases, of long standing, its close practical interest in such matters dates only from very recent years. It is thus faced with the necessity of trying to trim and adjust a situation which it did not create and which its individual officers can scarcely be expected to understand in detail. Another difficulty is that the divisions within the Treasury which deal with the staffing and complementing of the other departments are, on the whole, lightly manned and are not always, one gathers, in close touch with those which deal with the supply of money to the departments in question. A single principal, with perhaps an assistant principal to help him, may be responsible for staffing matters affecting a group of small departments or one or more large ones; and with the best will in the world, he can scarcely hope to acquire more than a sketchy knowledge of the territory he has to cover or to take the initiative in trying to achieve a reasoned and systematic deployment of the officers with whom he is concerned.

One gets the impression that Treasury work in this field is an art, rather than a science. The opportunities for occasional intervention are numerous, but sustained pressure is seldom possible. Every year, when the departmental estimates are submitted, figures for staff salaries will be included, but these are not in a form which facilitates any initiative on the part of the Treasury, nor are the quarterly returns of staff in post of much more use from this point of view. The half-yearly estimates submitted in connexion with the manpower ceilings which were first imposed during the war are, on the face of it, a more likely instrument. And requests to approve the creation of new posts sometimes afford an opportunity for a critical examination of the deployment of staff in the branches concerned. But there are gaps in the defences: departments have powers, on varying scales, to create new posts up to higher executive, and in one case senior executive officer level; and they do not always inform the Treasury of redundancies. The truth seems to be that Treasury interest in this field is still developing and that there will still have to be some adjustment, and possibly simplification, before this part of its arrangements works as well as that on the financial side.

But, for all its casual and occasional air, it would be unwise to underestimate the effectiveness of Treasury influence on establishments. The divisions concerned with the various departments have numerous allies—both inside and outside the Treasury, and they have also on their side the legend of Treasury omniscience. They have the help of the specialist branches concerned with grading, salaries, training and discipline generally and of the supply divisions concerned with the approval of projects and new legislation, as well as of the Treasury Organisation and Methods Division. The latter is a comparatively new ally, whose influence is most direct in the smaller departments which do not possess an organisation and methods branch of their own, and its functions will be considered more closely in a later chapter.

The Treasury is also able to extend its influence in staff matters through the Establishment Officers, who are responsible for the control and movement of staff, in the

departments. These officers, who are usually of assistant secretary or higher rank, are appointed with the approval of the Treasury; and while they are officers of the department and, as such, responsible to their own Permanent Secretary and Minister, they frequently look to the Treasury for support and guidance, and will not in practice disregard its legitimate directions, however politely and indirectly conveyed. These officers and their immediate subordinates act, so to speak, as a buffer between the Treasury and the other officers of their own departments, the latter exerting pressure on them in two ways: officially, as bearers of various degrees of formal responsibility, and unofficially, as members of staff associations. Some idea of their position in the departmental hierarchies and of the tasks performed within their branches can be obtained from Appendices Seven and Eight, and the former shows the almost equally important position held by the Finance Officer, another ally of the Treasury, who will be dealt with later.

It is the Establishment Officers who, if they do not in fact create the staffing situation within departments, inherit responsibility for it from earlier Establishment Officers, and, where they are able and tenacious of office, leave their mark upon it, before they, in turn, hand over to their successors. They can seldom afford the luxury of building from scratch or deploying their subordinates with theoretical perfection; and they are no more free agents than is a commander who takes over an army in the field. But they have their tactical victories, and, more than any other group of civil servants, they are responsible for the comings and goings and the level of employment of the rank and file of non-industrial civil servants.

Establishment Officers are, as we have seen, usually fairly senior administrative officers. The nature of their duties and the cautious traditions of their subordinates help to make them circumspect. Their position as commanders of minor outposts of the Treasury gives them a certain cachet, and their influence with their colleagues in charge of other branches is frequently considerable. They set the tone so far as questions of staff control and management

are concerned; and, as distinct from other administrators, who are generally concerned with specific aspects of the work of the department, they are primarily concerned with the management of men and women. Whereas the eyes of their administrative colleagues are raised towards their own Minister, Establishment Officers must always keep half an eye cocked towards the Chancellor and his advisers in the Treasury.

Broad descriptions of the duties of the administrative class as a whole abound in the literature. They usually place some emphasis on the fact that it is the administrative class that manages the civil service; and it is on the Establishment Officers and their immediate lieutenants that the bulk of this responsibility falls. Their functions are, with minor differences, similar throughout the service. It is they, or their assistants, who represent their Department in most of its dealings with the Ministry of Works, on questions of accommodation, and with the Stationery Office, on the supply of materials and office machinery, as well as with the Treasury and the staff associations, on staff questions. They are the housekeepers, as well as the personnel managers of their respective departments.

As regards housekeeping they are greatly assisted by the activities of the departmental finance branches, which prepare the annual estimates and are responsible for a great number of accounting matters and for innumerable day to day references to the Treasury. Technically, the Head of Department is responsible for accounting for monies spent to the Treasury and to Parliament, as represented by the Comptroller and Auditor-General and the Committee of Public Accounts; but in most departments there is an Accountant General or Finance Officer, who is an expert on such matters and on whom the Head of Department leans heavily. In the larger departments this officer will generally be an administrative officer, often an assistant secretary; and, together with the Establishment Officer, will act as an interpreter of Treasury policy, as an adviser as to what will, and what will not be likely to get through the estimates, and generally as a brake on any tendency to

novel, rash or unjustifiable expenditure. These financial duties, like those of the establishment branches, run, in a predictable current of business, right across the service. A Finance Officer, at a given time of the year, will be doing similar work to all other Finance Officers, dealing with the same Treasury circulars, responding in greater or lesser degree to Treasury promptings, and bringing to the business of accounting for public monies something of the same cautious and responsible attitude. The establishment and finance branches of most departments have an aurà of mellowness and respectability about them, which derives partly, perhaps, from the supervisory nature of their functions and partly from their intimate contacts with the Treasury.

Another member of the same team, albeit junior and still somewhat suspect in some quarters, is the Organisation and Methods Officer, who, in twenty or so of the largest departments, heads a branch of his own within the Establishment Division. In the other departments, organisation and methods are under the direct eye of the Establishment Officer, and in either case the work of this branch, which will be discussed in more detail, brings it into close touch, not only with other members of the Establishment Division of its own office, but with the Organisation and Methods Division of the Treasury. Training, like Organisation and Methods, is, in its present forms, still in the process of finding its way in the civil service, and, in general, the departmental training officers stand, in relation to the Treasury and their own Establishment Divisions, in a position not dissimilar from that of the officers responsible for Organisation and Methods. Training, too, will be considered in greater detail later; but it is worth noting, in the meantime, that these two branches of the various departments already play some part in the apparently loose and informal business of Treasury control of the structure of the civil service, and would be capable, if desired, of helping to draw the net closer.

The four types of officer (Establishment, Finance, Training and Organisation and Methods) we have already considered help to secure some degree of uniformity of approach, particularly on matters affecting staff, by

preaching current Treasury doctrines—or, in some instances, what they imagine to be such—within the departments. They are an important part of the processes generally summarised in the words 'treasury control'. They also provide useful illustrations of some of the duties commonly falling to members of the small group of administrators at the top of the service. Other administrators who frequently serve as liaison officers between the departments are the occupants (small in number and relatively junior in rank, but of potentially great influence) of what are called the 'private offices'. These officers, who are usually of principal or assistant principal rank, act as a personal link between Ministers and their departments. As private secretaries to Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries, their opportunities for making direct contact with politicians and with the Cabinet and its committees and for getting to know, not only what can be done but how it can be managed, by way of legislation and otherwise, are immense. They see not only the advice sought by and tendered to their own Minister but something, also, of the inner working of other departments. Their precise part in the relations between the civil service and the legislature will be considered later. In the meantime it need only be noted that they are transmitters—not only of Parliamentary opinions to the departments, but, in a less formal way, of currents of opinion within the departments to politicians and to other senior civil servants. There are, of course, other officers: lawyers, doctors and press and information officers, who contribute to and interpret climates of opinion in roughly the same way, but it can scarcely be said that they do so to such an extent as to affect the central processes which help to give the service such structural coherence as it now possesses. They do, however, make some contribution to the levelling of service standards and help to make it possible to assert that at whatever door one knocks in the service one will get roughly the same answer to the same question.

This is one of the principles to which the civil service is, quite properly, dedicated. It is, as we shall see, one that is not now as easily put into practice as it was before the

Second World War, when the administrative class was smaller and its members had, on the whole, more in common with each other, both educationally and socially, when the frame of reference was more settled and the scale and scope of State intervention and the volume of public business much smaller. This is not to say that the pre-war answers were always right, or that pre-war personalities and methods were better or worse than those of today. It is merely to point out that a new and more difficult task has now to be performed, by an enlarged and less homogeneous body of administrators.

The tasks of the administrative class which existed before the war remain, but they have been immensely complicated, and new ones have been added. We have already glanced at the contribution which the class makes to the processes of Treasury supervision, and we shall be considering later how its members go about the business of advising Ministers, and how they manage, at the same time, to impress something of the will of the Cabinet and of Parliament on the service. We have now to consider, at least in outline, how the humbler members of the class contribute to the structure of the service, with what people they deal from day to day, and on what occasions, and to what extent, they influence the multitude of minor and insignificant processes which contribute to the relations of the service with groups and individuals outside it.

Assistant secretaries and principals are usually shown in the structural charts which are much in vogue within departments and of which the one in Appendix Eight is a fair example, as being in charge of divisions and branches respectively, the former being larger or more important units, and usually, but not always, containing two or three branches within them. The principal is the captain of his branch, as it were, and the assistant secretary is in the position shall we say, of a rear admiral in command of a small force. Before the war these officers would not, in general, have been much concerned with staff matters. Nor would they have actively intervened in the day to day running of their branches which would have been matters primarily for the Head of

Section, staff clerk or other senior member of the clerical grade within the branch. Principals—outside the establishment sector, which we have already considered—would usually have been little more than gracious figureheads in this particular field.

Their main energies would have been directed elsewhere —to relations with important people and bodies outside the branch, with Parliament, and with other branches and other departments. The principal, and more particularly the assistant secretary, was, in general, a *deus ex machina*, whose occasional interventions were infrequent, critical and salutary, and whose utterances, or, more commonly, written pronouncements, were stored carefully as all-controlling precedents. This state of affairs still obtains to some extent in some areas of some departments; but elsewhere the Second World War has made great inroads upon it, and the events that have followed have made it unlikely that the old pattern or anything very like it will be resumed. The expansion of the service during the war, the taking on of new tasks in areas where nothing was cut and dried and there were few permanent boundaries or binding precedents, the great activity of Parliament and the courts, the employment of very large numbers of new staff, the rapid promotion of former members of the clerical and executive grades, the suspension of recruitment during the war, the reconstruction examinations and the methods of recruitment used at Stoke D'Abernon, have combined in some departments to bring the principal into closer contact with his branch and to give him some of the functions of a manager. It would be wrong to imagine that these functions are, even now, predominantly or generally exercised by principals (or by anyone else) but there is, nowadays, greater need for their exercise and there are also some signs that this need is being met quite consciously in some departments. In one medium-sized Ministry, for instance, integrated teams have been formed, with a view to providing a short and direct line of command from the assistant secretary to the clerical or executive officer who deals with the common run of day to day business. But this concept of the junior administrative

officers as, so to speak, 'expeditors', with their fingers on the pulse of their branches, is only gradually making its way within the service, and the greater part of the time of these officers is still, and probably always will be, so long as the class exists, spent looking outwards and upwards. Their function, in theory as well as in practice, still bears closer comparison with that of the captain of a man of war, or perhaps his signal officer, than with that of a first lieutenant. In merchant navy terms, there is more of the master than the mate about them.

What then, throughout the service, are the broad bands of activity in which administrative officers, other than those in the establishment and allied branches, commonly find themselves engaged? One of the oldest and best established is that of quasi-lawyer, administering and interpreting blocks of statutes and regulations which are well settled generally and on which legal advice has been freely taken in the past but on which awkward points, clashes of law and equity (or of concepts of equity) and similar problems calling for the exercise of considerable discretion arise from time to time. The Home Office and parts of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government provide long-standing examples of this kind of administration, and the insurance divisions of the Ministry of Pensions and National Insurance have recently added new functions of the same sort to the service.

Allied to this kind of administrative work is the regulatory and supervisory work in departments which, like the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health, are dealing from day to day with Local Authorities and other autonomous or semi-autonomous bodies. Before the war these quasi-legal and supervisory duties could usually be exercised, *de haut en bas*, by way of well considered memoranda, circulars and instructions. The administrators in this field were almost exclusively case workers, well versed in the arts of logical analysis and orderly exposition. Their minutes were rounded, their decisions explicit and carefully considered and their official letters models of precision. There are still areas of the service where work of this quality is possible, but there are also very many branches where the comings

and goings of the war, the spate of new legislation and the need to keep pace with happenings on neighbouring fronts have caused the principal and the assistant secretary to spend much more time than previously keeping in touch with the movement of events, fiddling with the machinery and making minor adjustments designed to keep it from becoming too obviously obsolescent.

These developments have left their mark on another area of administrative activity which we now have to consider—that where important, influential or potentially dangerous bodies and individuals are greeted, listened to, placated and kept informed. Civil servants have, thank goodness, long been plagued by men—and more recently by women—who are disinclined to take no for an answer, and who, if they are not dealt with shrewdly, will make trouble and, if the victim of their assaults is not careful, at long length get the law altered! It has long been the task of the junior administrative officer, in the last resort, to turn away the wrath of such people. Sometimes a graceful concession can be made. Sometimes an apparently fatuous rule can be explained and enforced. Sometimes a judicious interview can achieve what innumerable letters have failed to. Sometimes a present refusal can be tempered with an undertaking to look into the possibility of amending an obsolescent Act or Regulation. Sometimes—*mirabile dictu*—an admission can be made that the outsider is right.

This personal touch—the considered exercise of discretion—is increasingly in evidence now that the welfare state has brought central government into closer contact with individuals in sectors which were formerly the preserve of unofficial or semi-official bodies. And the persons who have to be dealt with in this way have increased in number and diversity of origin, just as their problems have, at least superficially, increased in complexity. One of the difficulties is that there are more people at all levels, both in and on the verge of public administration, who have to be consulted. The fact that more is being done for old people, that there is a health service, that there has been new legislation in the field of child protection, means that

the administrator in the departments dealing with these matters is forever running across other officers at roughly his own level—potential allies certainly, but also potential critics, observers and consultants. Many branches of the service which before the war were working in splendid—and perhaps deliberate—isolation are now flanked, if not jostled, by other agencies, engaged in related, if not actually competitive, activities. And the same tendencies outside the service: the provision of welfare facilities, pension schemes and so forth by private firms, the development of new professional and pseudo-professional bodies which have to be consulted, the organisation of assaults on overseas markets, the distribution and rationing of commodities through trade associations, the co-operation with local authorities in housing drives and the new emphasis on social justice, all make for wider and more frequent consultation at managerial level.

One of the outcomes of this is the rash of committees and working parties which disfigures the service and absorbs a great deal of time at the administrative level. Many of these are inevitable responses to the need for consultation. Others are conveniences which, with a little firmness and hard thinking in the right places at the right time, might be dispensed with. But they exist—as indeed some of them have always existed—within the service; and 'committeemanship' is one of the arts which must be learned and practised by the junior administrator.

One further role in which the administrative class of the service increasingly finds itself cast is that of interpreter and evaluator of professional advice—whether it be legal, medical, statistical or what you will. The administrator's relationship with his legal colleagues has long been understood—at least in most parts of the service. The latter are primarily givers of advice on specific issues and drafters of enactments whose broad heads have been previously settled. They are not, in general, initiators; they are not accustomed to answer hypothetical questions, and their interventions in the field of policy-making are rare, if occasionally salutary. The same is not always true, in

practice, of the administrator's relations with some of the newer professional grades. He has not yet mastered their jargon as well as he has that of the lawyer, he is more easily baffled by their mysteries, and the doctrine that it is the administrator who runs the show and must take the decisions loses some of its force when he cannot put his hand on his heart and swear that he has a precise understanding of all the implications of what is being done. There are fields of government activity at present in which it is essential that the administrator should be something of an expert and that the expert should be something of an administrator, and it is only with some difficulty and much good-will that the traditional position that it is, in general, the administrative class which finally advises Ministers, can be maintained.

With this glimpse of the administrative civil servant locked in consultation with his professional colleagues we must leave the administrators for the time being and try to describe the part played in the processes of government by the executive class, which provides the service with its middle grades and, as it were, with its non-commissioned officers.

It has been said, somewhat non-committally, that the executive class does work which is not allocated either to the administrative or to the clerical class. It might be said with equal truth that it performs the tasks which the former will not, and the latter cannot, undertake. It is not yet a fully integrated class, some 28,000 of its 64,000 members belonging to the departmental grades of the Ministry of Labour and the Inland Revenue; but these minor distinctions of grading, pay and conditions have in themselves little bearing on the types of work done by the officers concerned, or on their place—which is an important one—in the service hierarchy. We have seen in Chapter I that the executives have to a great extent invaded the administrative fastnesses, and that their numbers have, in turn, been reinforced from the clerical ranks; and we have noticed that they serve in some measure as a link between those doing the highest work and those engaged on what have been called simple

mechanical duties. It remains to be seen if we can describe, if not define, their specific contribution to the make-up of the service.

The executive class came into being in 1920 as a result of the recommendations of the Reorganisation Committee of the National Whitley Council, and it may be as well to repeat what the committee had to say about the functions of the class in relation to the structure of the service as a whole.

'The administrative and clerical work of the Civil Service', stated the Committee in its report, 'may be said to fall into two main categories. In one category may be placed all such work as either is of a simple mechanical kind or consists in the application of well-defined regulations, decisions and practice to particular cases; in the other category, the work which is concerned with the formation of policy, with the revision of existing practice or current regulations and decisions and with the organisation and direction of the business of Government.' The Committee went on to recommend that the work of the first category should be done by a Writing Assistant Class and a Clerical Class and that of the second by an Executive and an Administrative Class. Thus, as the Society of Civil Servants has not been slow to point out in its evidence to the Royal Commission on the Civil Service, the main line of division was drawn between the routine and clerical work on the one hand and the executive and administrative work on the other, and there was from the first a close relationship between the work of the executive and administrative classes.

The committee described the work it would assign to the executive class as follows:

'. . . the higher work of the supply and accounting departments, and of other executive or specialised branches of the Civil Service. This work covers a wide field, and requires in different degrees the qualities of judgment, initiative and resource. In the junior ranks it comprises the critical examination of particular cases of lesser importance not clearly within the scope of approved regulations or general decision, initial investigations into matters of higher

importance, and the immediate direction of small blocks of business. In its upper ranges it is concerned with matters of internal organisation and control, with the settlement of broad questions arising out of business in hand or in contemplation, and with the responsible conduct of important operations.'

This definition is not in itself very revealing, particularly when it is realised that, before 1939, the executive class was a very small one, concerned mainly with accounting matters and that many of the tasks it now undertakes were either not performed at all by the service or were performed by members of a 'super clerical' structure. These latter were merged with the executives in 1947, at which time provision was made for an extension of the class to all branches where there was work to be done within the Reorganisation Committee's definition of executive work. Nor were the various attempts which have been made to distinguish the functions of the executives from those of the administrators very successful. The Treasury, in its Factual Memorandum to the Royal Commission, states that the executives are concerned with 'the day-to-day conduct of Government business within the framework of established policy', but admits, elsewhere in the Memorandum, that 'it is not always possible to draw a clear-cut distinction between policy work and executive work'. This is, as we shall see, a modest admission, and it appears that, in face of the rapid war-time and post-war expansion of the service and its functions on the one hand, and the limitation of the size of the administrative class and the determination to retain for it the character of a corps d'élite on the other, it is the executive class which has expanded and moulded itself to the new shape of affairs and has to a great extent influenced the precise course of these developments. And it has been this class, over the last decade, that has, more than any other, been the arbiter of what is and what is not possible.

The Society of Civil Servants, in arguing before the recent Royal Commission that executives should be paid more, makes a number of interesting claims for the class as a whole. It points out, correctly, that the 'growth of the

Civil Service and the creation of new Departments with large local office organisations have greatly widened the scope of the duties performed by the executive class', and goes on to state that 'the organisation and direction of much of the work of Government departments and the maintenance of a high level of managerial efficiency rests upon the executive grades. This function has acquired special significance with the development of the welfare state, and the creation and retention of public goodwill is a new and important responsibility. For the average citizen, the civil service means those officers whom he or she meets in the administration of the social services, where claims are made and benefits provided in great variety. The executive class is now playing a vital role in social administration in addition to its key position in public administration. In several departments the executive class is closely involved with the industrial and economic life of the country.' These are large claims, and we shall have to enquire later how much impact the executives make and what sort of influence they exert in the areas which they have been steadily infiltrating since the Second World War. But that they do occupy these areas of public administration, and that they are there in force and in a bewildering variety of capacities, can scarcely be denied.

Something of the range of the work done by the class can be gathered from the following extract from the official pamphlet 'Posts in the Civil Service for University Graduates':

'Executive Officers may be secretaries to the Regional Boards for Industry; Assistants to Psychologists; Recorders of purchase tax; Keepers of food statistics; Hotel managers in the Carlisle State Management District; Hospital Secretaries under the Ministry of Pensions; in the printing or duplicating or binding services in the Stationery Office; experts on foreign exchange rates; the equivalent of solicitors' managing clerks. They may investigate claims and authorise awards for National Assistance; they may specialise in the films work of the Central Office of Information; they may help to assemble land use surveys or population surveys

for the Ministry of Local Government and Planning.' It is also a feature of the class that a fair proportion of its members, particularly those in the Inland Revenue and the Ministry of Labour and National Service, are employed outside London. A small number are stationed overseas.

Apart from specialised duties of the kind quoted, the work of the executives falls broadly into five or six main groups which the Society has chosen in its evidence to divide as follows: supervision and management; administrative work; contract and supply; accounting and auditing; interpretation and application of law and regulations, and statistical work. These descriptions give a fair idea of the scope of the work, but as dividing lines between the various tasks performed within the class they are of unequal merit. The contract and supply and auditing and accounting work done by the class is of long standing and admits of fairly precise definition. It involves a multiplicity of minor and routine contacts with people in the business world, the armed forces and other departments. It includes the preparation and modification of contracts, the examination of tenders and the checking of work and goods supplied and also the custody, accounting for and transport of all types of stores, particularly those required by the service departments, the Ministry of Supply and the Post Office. On the accounting and auditing side, executives have become in course of time the acknowledged experts, presiding over systems of immense extent and complexity, to the depths of which few administrators or other outsiders have ever had the time or competence to penetrate. They account, in forbidding detail, for the precise disposition of immense quantities of public money, and are, at the higher ranges of this work, in close contact with their professional counterparts outside the service, and particularly with those in the nationalised industries and Local Government.

The other processes in which the executives are engaged are less easily susceptible of precise measurement. In their quasi-legal work, in connexion with the interpretation of orders and regulations they are sometimes, as for instance in the Charity Commission or in certain branches of the

Ministry of Education, treading well-worn ground, where they are more frequently in contact with solicitors and their clerks than with individual members of the public and where their contribution to the acquisition, management and disposal of lands and monies, and the schemes and orders which they help to make, follow well-established lines. But in work concerned with the application of rationing, price control and licensing they have been brought face to face with the business world in conditions which have called for great powers of improvisation and flexibility and for an ability to see the wood for the trees which has, for reasons which we shall be discussing more fully later, not invariably been forthcoming on either side.

In pensions and similar welfare work the executives have also been breaking new ground, so far as the service is concerned, and have been brought into close contact with the health and welfare work of Local Authorities and with individual members of the public. It is one thing to administer, in one of the older departments, a statute which has lasted a century or so and is still subsisting and to deal with agents whose precise status of mild subservience has been defined over the decades. It is quite another to administer a fluctuating mass of statutory instruments in a field where government interference is recent or unpopular, or where, as in the case of the Health Service, a new and still fluid set of relationships with people and organisations outside the service is in process of being worked out.

In the statistical sphere the combination of old and new duties is equally well illustrated. Not only are the executives found running and taking part in the statistical branches of various Ministries which compile statistics; they are found using and interpreting figures and acting as assistants, not only to statisticians and chief statisticians, but to the principals and assistant secretaries responsible for the policy aspects of statistical work. Without this particular kind of expertise—the knowledge of what can and what cannot be done, in the conditions which the service has inherited—the difficulties and conflicts of opinion—and of values—which sometimes arise between the adminis-

trators and their technical advisers in this and other spheres might often be much less easily resolved. It is in many respects the executives, with their sheer weight of service experience and detailed knowledge of staff management, who act as a check on the professional officers and, in some instances, guide their activities into useful channels. Put in another and less kindly way, the general effect of the presence of the executives in this field is to act as a damper on potentially dangerous or disturbing enthusiasms.

But it is in supervision and management and in the related field of administration that the most significant contribution of the executives is to be found. Indeed, their part in staff management in many departments is so important that it is from them and their traditions—and not from those of the administrators—that civil service establishment methods frequently derive their flavour. In most large departments there are blocks of work which are almost entirely the preserve of the executives and where the writ of the administrators scarcely runs or needs to run. The Savings Department of the Post Office, with a staff of some 13,000, is a case in point. Woolwich Arsenal is another, the Pensions Branch of the Ministry of Education a third; while the Stationery Office, with a staff of some 5,000, is entirely managed by executives, and in some small offices such as the Charity Commission control is divided between executive and professional officers.

In local offices, too, the executives play an overwhelmingly important part. They are the managers of local offices of the Ministry of Pensions and National Insurance, of labour exchanges and of Assistance Board offices. They control large blocks of industrial staff in H.M. Dockyards, and in various outposts of the Ministry of Supply, and they comprise the Inspectorates of sundry departments. They not only manage outposts from day to day, but they control promotion and set the prevailing tone within them. It is, in a large measure, their values and their standards which make themselves felt in the relations between the staffs of these local offices and the members of the public with whom they come into contact.

Finally, their direct contribution to administration and the making of policy and their indirect contribution behind the scenes, are very considerable. Not only do the more junior of them take the early impact of most enquiries which are finally dealt with at administrative level and contribute the first draft of most circulars and many regulations, but some of the more senior of them have the management of branches and are empowered to take decisions not markedly less important than those taken by administrators, right up to assistant secretary, and, in some instances, under-secretary level. The Clerk to the Special Commissioners is responsible to the Board of Inland Revenue, for instance, for the administration of surtax, in connexion with which some 1,650 people are engaged; and his advice will obviously influence policy decisions as regards fresh or amending legislation in this field. At slightly lower levels, other senior members of the executive class are mingling their experience with that of the administrators and professional officers, not only in the management of branches and the deployment of men and money, but in preparing plans for the future and in responding to parliamentary pressures.

It is difficult to extricate the contribution of the executives to administration and to that elusive thing called 'the making of policy' from that of the administrators. It is clear, of course, that there are areas of activity near Ministers and at the heart—if one may use such a word—of the Treasury which the executives are seldom allowed to enter, and equally there are branches and whole departments which, by reason of the humdrum, detailed, repetitious or well-regulated nature of the work, are clearly well suited to executive control. But, between these, there are numerous areas where junior administrators and senior executives are working side by side and where the precise allocation of posts appears on the face of it to be more or less accidental. It would be idle to suggest that in these areas the traditional distinction—that administrators make policy and executives do not—really works. And it is more helpful, on the whole, to approach this matter by asking with whom officers

of the respective classes are generally called upon to deal and where they are finally expected to end their service careers.

If we adopt this approach, we find the administrators occupying, on the whole, posts that will eventually lead them towards Ministers or the Treasury or bring them under the fire of Parliament, while the executives of roughly the same level, who will be older men, will be found, in general, where there is much detailed work to be done within the branch and possibly more contact with the public but little impact on Parliament and other bodies and persons traditionally regarded as influential. Thus, it might be thought that the executives are to be found manning merely the rear and side portals of the service, while the administrators are in charge of the main gates. But these terms only make sense if one accepts the traditional view that most of the worth-while decisions have to be made in relation to Ministers or Parliament or possibly the Treasury. If one believes, on the other hand, that the innumerable day-to-day contacts with individuals, firms and minor organisations outside the service are equally important and that one cannot usefully discuss 'policy' without taking these contacts and processes into account, then it is obvious that by sheer weight of numbers the executives must exercise a very great influence on the character of public administration.

If the service were a tightly organised unit, compact, well-integrated and with all eyes invariably turned attentively to the centre, the traditional theory might fit the facts. But it is not an instrument of this kind. And a little thought should convince anyone that it would be quite intolerable for all concerned if it were. It is, of course, a disciplined service; and it is amazing what a really strong Minister, or a judicious raising of eyebrows by someone at the right level in the Treasury, can accomplish. But detailed and continuous central control of the things that make up the character of the service, and that vitally affect its relations with the public, there is not, and cannot be. The influence exerted from above on the executives is perhaps not unlike that of a good amateur captain on a

team of professional cricketers—stimulating and occasionally decisive, but not in general sufficient, or intended to be sufficient, to prevent them from playing their own game, in their own way, at their own pace.

But if mere quantity determines quality in this way, it may be argued, why stop at the executives? Is it altogether safe to ignore the influence that must be wielded by the big battalions under their command—the clericals, and indeed the sub-clericals, typists, messengers and others? The answer is that it is not, of course, safe to ignore them, but that one should not mistake the nature, or exaggerate the extent, of their influence. It would matter, of course, if messengers were accustomed to carry files at a snail's pace through the corridors of Whitehall. It matters, too, whether the Post Office Clerk smiles or scowls as he or she hands you your book of stamps. But messengers do not deploy scores or hundreds of other messengers. And Post Office clerks do not usually take decisions which may have a real sting in them, which cannot be readily questioned, or which contain within them the seeds of countless other decisions. Executives, as we have seen, do all these things habitually. Members of the clerical classes do them very rarely, and despite their numbers they have in general only a small influence on the *positive* processes whereby the service and its relations with the public are conditioned.

This is not to say that all decisions taken below executive level are trivial. Among the clerical, higher clerical and similar officers there are many whose duties are by no means mechanical or repetitive. Indeed one of the least easily explicable aspects of the grading system by which so many thousands of jobs in various departments are all given the same name and paid at the same rate is the immense difference that exists between the responsibilities carried by clerical officers. In some branches of some Ministries their duties are entirely routine, requiring not the least initiative and allowing not the least scope for personal distinction. In others the clerical officers may interview the public on matters of great delicacy, deal (with only the slightest of supervision) with legal matters arising, say, from

compulsory purchase, or play a crucial part in the efficient running of registries handling hundreds of letters weekly. Much depends on the qualities of the individual, but more depends, as we shall see, on the organisation of the office concerned. And all in all, it is quite clear that what the clericals do, despite the multifarious activities in which they are engaged, does not, in the positive sense we have been considering in the case of the executives, greatly affect the make-up of the service. What they leave undone, and the time things occasionally take to permeate their ranks, is another matter.

Before the Second World War the clerical class had its own superstructure, composed of higher clerical officers, staff clerks, heads of section and other senior clerical officers of similar rank, if of somewhat different designation. In 1947 all but a few of these—the exceptions being higher clerical officers in charge of large blocks of staff doing routine work—were absorbed into the executive class. The present truncated clerical class, general and departmental, contains, as we have seen, some 76,000 men, more than half of whom are forty or over, and some 39,000 women, of whom nearly 40 per cent. are in similar age groups, engaged in the main on a fairly simple range of duties and supervised in general by executives. They are, in other words, largely immune from the direct influence of the administrators and, also, from that of Ministers or of Parliament. They are, on the other hand, directly exposed, on all sorts of fronts, to the public. And the public, equally, are exposed to them. For errors of judgment affecting policy or organisation, the clericals and allied classes can legitimately disclaim responsibility. But if an inept reply—or no reply at all—is given to a member of the public in a particular instance, it may well be a clerical officer somewhere, aided and abetted doubtless by inefficient supervision, who has held up the case, or blundered. And where departmental instructions are rigid and immensely detailed, and where there are more of them than one would wish, this may be partly due to the character—or sometimes what is fancied to be the character—of the clerical battalions who will have to interpret them.

If the Inland Revenue could employ senior wranglers and ex-diplomats in all its local offices there would, perhaps, be less forms and frustration for tax-payers. But the taxes would doubtless be somewhat higher. If one is to have government intervention roughly on the present scale—and the major political parties seem to be broadly agreed on this—and if one is to have something approaching full employment—and here again there appears to be broad agreement—and if we cannot afford immensely improved and extended education for all, then a labour force of roughly the present quality seems to be predicated for the clerical and sub-clerical ranks of the civil service. It is not a bad force, and it is not one that cannot be made better with more careful training and deployment. But it is not a force with which one can take liberties or indulge in fancy manoeuvres. It is steady and predictable—not brilliant—a paddle-boat of a labour force. And it is no use expecting it to behave like a Cunarder.

CHAPTER III

Conditioning

THE civil service is one of those callings—the church, the law, the land, sailoring and innkeeping are others—that frequently leave their mark upon a man; and in this chapter and the next we shall consider some of the very many ways in which this may come about. We shall try to discover what it is that turns the unlicked graduate into the urbane under-secretary, the fluttery typist into the strong-minded M.B.E., or the wild young man from the forces into the sober custodian of minor official secrets. For this purpose we shall be examining, in the present chapter, matters affecting training, staff relations, conditions of service and promotion and, in the next chapter, the methods the civil service has traditionally used in going about its work.

It is not possible to talk helpfully about training in the civil service, or, for that matter, to make useful proposals for improving it, without understanding that the great bulk of it has always been done 'on the job' and that, whatever paper schemes may be drawn up for altering this state of affairs, it is likely to continue unless quite radical changes are made in the organisation and structure of the service. Training must obviously be linked with the nature of the work, the way it is organised and the methods by which it is done. While these remain, as they are, largely instinctive rather than rational, piecemeal rather than planned, training, too, must clearly be, in the main, a haphazard and fortuitous business of picking up tips, learning wrinkles, guessing at the motives and reactions of one's superiors, relying on their personal goodwill and generally floundering about in the deep end until one has somehow taught oneself to swim.

There are a dozen supervisors in the service who believe in this kind of training, which they call 'learning the job by doing it', for every one who believes that training should pay regard to the needs of the individual and should be planned, against the background of his probable service career, with a view to making him a better and more enlightened all-round civil servant.

It is tempting to rail against this attitude and to suggest alternative methods of training, as successive committees have done; but there are reasons for the traditional service line on training, and it is only fair to begin by giving them due weight. They derive, as has been hinted, from the way things have always been arranged within the service and the way it goes about the work it has to do; and these things in turn owe something to the sort of people who are drawn into the service and the manner in which they are deployed—matters we have already glanced at—and also to that empirical streak in the English character which prefers practice to theory, has a genius for making the best of what comes easiest to hand and likes to do good by stealth and accomplish its reforms, as it were, by accident.

It must be remembered, in the first place, that if the attitude of many service supervisors somewhat resembles that of Mr. Squeers, they may legitimately prefer the excuse that, like him, they have a great deal of hard and unpleasant work to get done. Few supervisors would admit that the margin of staff time allowed for training is realistic, and most establishment officers would be hard put to it to show, in the various branches, the extra posts that have been created with a view to allowing some time to be spent on training. The officers within the departmental establishment branches have, almost without exception, themselves survived the process of being thrown in at the deep end, and the spirit in which they approach the business of making provision for training, not unnaturally, frequently reflects their private conviction that what has made them the men they are cannot after all be such a bad method.

In the second place, there is much to be said, in the context of the service, particularly as it has existed over the last

forty years or so, for the methods that have been adopted. The long period between the wars, when there was so little movement that a man who is now competently performing the duties of an assistant secretary may well have remained as a clerical officer or the equivalent for more than a decade, gave ample opportunity for the kinds of training that approximate to drill, and provided little incentive for the broader kinds of education that fit a man for promotion and greater responsibility. It may be said that the wartime and post-war expansion of public business caught the service napping and that not only some of the individuals concerned but the post-war service and the public at large have suffered because their experience had not always given them the flexibility and resilience that would have allowed them to rise to the occasion and accept the responsibilities and opportunities that events offered. There is some truth in this, and it might be said that every public service, and in fact every large organisation, ought to have something in reserve for just such an emergency. But against this it could doubtless be argued that it would be somewhat cynical to plan a home civil service on the assumption that there will be a major war every twenty years or so.

There is also this to be said: training on the job is unavoidable, and it is almost inevitable that in this country it will remain so. There is nothing doctrinaire about English government, any more than there is about English politics or English life generally, and it is most likely that certain illogicalities, inconsistencies and sheer inefficiencies of the kind that shocked Bentham will remain to irritate others. New brooms never got very far very quickly in the British Civil Service, and it is a fair assumption that the somewhat loose and informal methods of Treasury and Parliamentary control, the traditional, rather than functional, arrangement of grades and departments and the variously recruited collection of persons at present in the service will not disappear or change utterly overnight. It follows that neither the somewhat academic Continental approach to these matters nor the American passion for clean sweeps and fresh starts is likely, at least in the near future, to take

the place of the empirical, catch as catch can, make do and mend, approach that has usually dominated public administration in this country. One can continue to expect new branches to be tacked on to old departments, old offices to be given new functions, eighteenth and nineteenth century systems to be adapted, agreements to disagree to be perpetuated in consolidating legislation and new wine to be measured carefully into old bottles. And, all this being so, there will be many things that cannot be neatly written down and lectured about, many parts of the government machine that work 'by guess and by God' and apparently in defiance of logic, many structures that it is perhaps better not to look at too closely, lest one is tempted to tinker and bring them about one's ears. All these considerations are well known to affect English life and institutions generally. Indeed we sometimes catch ourselves boasting about them. We must not be surprised, therefore, if they are present in our civil service to an extent that makes it inevitable that a great deal of the training given to newcomers must necessarily be informal and by word of mouth, calculated rather to help them to get the feel of things than explain precisely why they are being done.

It must be said, too, that in many respects—and within its limits—the traditional system can work well. It has produced excellent men, and much hard and unselfish work has been put into it. There are, among the older civil servants, who are now passing or have already passed into retirement, many who brought into the service a dignity, loyalty and scrupulous honesty derived from Edwardian days, and contrived to transmit something of these to their juniors. Some of these men were born teachers, with the desire to bequeath their knowledge and their skills not uncommon among those who have well-defined standards of their own. The young man or woman coming into the service before the Second World War who had one of these officers as his immediate mentor and personal supervisor was fortunate indeed. The difficulty has always been that there were all too few of these stalwarts, and their numbers are now disastrously thin, their links with the present genera-

tion of new-comers increasingly tentative and continuity of experience too often lacking. In one way and another the upheavals that have taken place since 1939 have greatly decreased the chances of a junior's receiving this kind of training, and it is not unlikely nowadays that he will have to be taught his job in snatches and hurriedly helped to pick up what he can here and there by people who have acquired their own knowledge in much the same way and have had only the briefest acquaintance with the work in hand.

The shortcomings of civil service training, so far as the clerical, executive and administrative classes are concerned, have not passed unnoticed by various committees, including the Committee on the Training of Civil Servants, which reported in 1944, and steps have been taken to reinforce the traditional arrangements. The Treasury now exercises a general control of training and there are training officers in the departments, who organise courses for new entrants, maintain training libraries, arrange training visits and distribute information about further education facilities. In some departments, notably the Post Office and the Inland Revenue, work of this kind has been done successfully for many years and the functions of the training officer are already closely integrated with those of the other heads of branches. But in other departments the training officer is still regarded as a fifth wheel on the coach and his efforts are not always taken very seriously. Much depends on personalities. If the training officer is a capable and practical man and is backed up by the Head of Department and his establishment officer there is some chance of welding the new, and less direct, methods of training on to the direct, if informal ones traditionally favoured by most branches. If, on the other hand, as is sometimes the case, the training post is regarded as a soft option on the fringe of the Establishment Branch, to be filled, possibly, by an officer who is something of a theorist and has not shown himself particularly well suited to the heat and dust of the service, then the battle is lost before it is begun.

The fact seems to be that training of the more formal kind favoured by the 1944 Committee is still a somewhat

thankless business in the service, despite the support given to it by the Treasury and the lip-service paid to it by departments; and this is a difficulty that exists at all levels in the service. Few of the older supervisors are much interested and many of the younger ones are still too busy putting their own houses in order to be able, or inclined, to spend much time investing for the future in this way. The man who has time to talk about his work is still regarded, by and large, as a man who, if he tried hard enough, could doubtless find something better to do; and there is still, here and there, a suspicion that it might be better, on the whole, not to teach too many of the lower orders to think too hard too soon.

These attitudes are, as we have seen, readily explicable, but their effect on the juniors concerned is not always fortunate. The officer recruited to the clerical, executive or administrative ranks by the Civil Service Commission and allocated to a department is thenceforth to a very large extent at the mercy of that department so far as training and career prospects are concerned. It has a positive duty and responsibility towards him as an individual which it is not always easy to discharge properly. If the department fails to take proper steps to bring out the best in a new recruit because it takes no active interest in his training he has no very obvious remedy. It is unlikely that he will know what is happening until the damage has been done, and if he is a clerical officer or a junior executive officer the crime may never be discovered. He will sink into unindustrious and unambitious obscurity in some corner of his parent department, and the natural abilities which might have been used to make him an efficient officer will be blunted or turned outside the service. And, ironically enough, as we shall see, the very people who have been responsible for narrowing his horizon and keeping down his standards may well be required to pass judgment on him.

It is not nowadays intended that departments should leave recruits to fend for themselves in quite this way. There are classes for the very young, and, even for older people, there are new-entrants' courses, designed, among

other things, to give some idea of the scope of the department's work and to acquaint the newcomer with some of the basic tools of his trade. The junior executive grade is supposed, in fact, to be a training grade, and in most departments some effort at least is made to move the new executive officer up through a range of posts of gradually increasing difficulty in his early years. But it is not easy to ensure that this happens without weakening the branches, and the needs of the branch usually have to be put first. In the last resort, therefore, everything depends on the attitude of the head of the branch or section—the higher executive officer, senior executive officer, or possibly the principal concerned. If they are interested in training and are prepared to suffer some present inconvenience for the sake of future efficiency—are prepared, in other words, to exchange a bird in the hand for a potentially better one in the bush, then all things are possible. If they are unsympathetic, such training as the training officer manages to inject becomes a poor, inadequate and rather pointless thing.

It is for this reason that what has aptly been termed 'training by encouragement' is of great potential value to the service, and, in particular, to its junior members. If the man who is in control of staff—usually one of the more senior executives but sometimes a junior administrator—can find means of showing that he is interested in the way the work is done, values the contribution of individual officers and is anxious to increase it, his example will sooner or later be contagious. There will be no need for him to be, or appear to be, unduly altruistic about it or to conceal the fact that one of his interests lies in getting the work done quicker or better or in avoiding unnecessary processes. Most people like to belong to an organisation that is working well. They like to surprise people by the speed with which they answer letters, and get an occasional pat on the back, rather than to annoy them by their dilatoriness and be kicked for their pains. They would rather grasp a job and do it well than grope for the answers all the time and do things badly. And they prefer, on the whole, the feeling that someone is watching and taking an interest in them to the

suspicion that they are on their own and that what they do, or fail to do, does not, after all, matter very much.

There is, as yet, a dearth of this kind of benevolent intervention in many branches of the service. Not all of the older supervisors are capable of the lightness of touch that is required if it is to be done successfully. It is not very useful, from the particular point of view we are now considering, if the interventions are so mechanical and dogmatic as to crush all initiative in the trainee. They may be helpful to the branch from the point of view of ensuring uniformity, and they may at least teach young men to suffer discipline, if not gladly, at least with a good grace. But they will not help them to think for themselves or to look about them and try to see the implications of what they are doing. Among the younger supervisors the obstacle is frequently thoughtlessness or impatience. It is often quicker and surer to do the job oneself than to help a subordinate to learn to do it—easier to scrap his draft, or slash it mercilessly, than to tell him what is really wanted and let him try again. But there is no reason whatever why 'training by encouragement' should not develop quite quickly within the service, once the need for it is thoroughly understood. A generation of supervisors which is not inhibited by its own past from using such methods is, as we have seen earlier, slowly moving towards positions of influence, and those of its members who will have to do the encouraging (if matters are to be improved) are readily accessible to the Treasury and to their own training branches.

The need for a helping hand of this kind, and the troubles that may ensue if it is not given at the right time are dramatically illustrated in the case of assistant principals by the possible fate of a young man straight from college who happens to be allocated to a department or branch where there is little suitable work for him and no one who has the time or competence to train him. The Treasury are not unaware of possibilities of this kind, and there is provision for a report to be made to the Civil Service Commission at the end of the assistant principal's two year probation period. He has thus a form of protection not available to the

junior executive or clerical officer, but by the time this period has been completed much damage may have been done.

It is not often, of course, that this process goes so far as to ruin a young man's career prospects or to unfit him for future service, but it may well act, in a greater or lesser degree, as a brake on his progress, and it may confirm or implant lackadaisical habits which will last for life, or instil a restlessness or cynicism that it will prove hard to eradicate. The difficulty is that the process of training assistant principals, who are members of what is acknowledged to be a cadet grade, is so informal, and relies so heavily on the judgment and goodwill of officers within the departments, who may not always be fully aware of what is asked of them, that there is no effective guarantee against happenings of this kind. The Treasury does keep an eye on these young people, of whom there are never at any date more than a few dozen, by arranging central courses from time to time. But these do not, as far as can be seen, make it possible to form a reliable second opinion of the recruit's abilities or of his progress.

The actual training of assistant principals is, in most departments, conducted 'on the job'. The new recruit sits opposite a principal and devils for him for a few months, until, perhaps at the end of a year, he is making a fairly substantial contribution to the work of the branch and can make some sort of fist of deputising for his principal when he is absent or on leave. Later he will go to other branches and, finally, perhaps, to the private office, where he will have a unique opportunity of getting a bird's eye view of the work of the department. Not much harm can come to him in this way if he is in a large office with plenty of work that is of a scale of importance usually regarded as administrative.

Other offices do not allocate an assistant principal to a specific principal or encourage him to enter into the day-to-day work of a branch or taste responsibility of the kind that usually falls to a principal. They prefer to give him a roving commission, letting him write memoranda and prepare briefs, possibly for an assistant secretary, and watch, rather than participate in, the work of the office.

This process may work well if the Establishment Officer keeps a close eye on the young man concerned and makes it clear to him what is expected of him. But it is open to the criticism that the recruit may not be given many opportunities to show precisely what he can do in practice and may be tempted to slack off, and then, somewhat unfairly, criticised for doing so. It is also, of course, open to the objection that the senior officers concerned must either rely largely on their own subjective judgments, made on little evidence, or call in aid those of others for whom the recruit has never actually worked from day to day.

An assistant principal who is not reported on favourably by his department at the end of his two years' instruction will have his case considered in the last resort by the Civil Service Commission and may be given a fresh trial in a new department. There is no similar machinery for an executive or clerical officer, and there is not perhaps quite the same presumption that he is being consciously trained for anything. He could, in theory, seek an interview with his Head of department, but his best course, if something has gone wrong in his own department, is normally to try to go elsewhere. This is, as can be imagined, not always easy to arrange, but sometimes the officer concerned can enlist the aid of his staff association, or, in certain circumstances, the staff side of the Departmental Whitley Council. In some departments the staff side does, in fact, itself make a considerable contribution to training, and it is time we considered the part it plays, not only in training but in a large variety of other matters affecting staff management.

Whitleyism, which was first introduced into the service in 1919, has become such a familiar piece of service furniture at the national and departmental level, that it is sometimes taken for granted; but it would be wrong to underrate the various roles it plays in the long and continuous processes of conditioning to which civil servants are subject. Its objects, as expressed in the constitution of the National Whitley Council, are 'to secure the greatest measure of co-operation between the State in its capacity as employer, and the general body of civil servants in matters affecting the Civil Service,

with a view to increasing efficiency in the public service combined with the well-being of those employed; to provide machinery for dealing with grievances, and generally to bring together the experience and different points of view of representatives of the administrative, clerical and manipulative Civil Service'. The scope of the National Council's functions comprises 'all matters which affect the conditions of service of the staff' and its specific functions include 'the encouragement of the further education of civil servants and their training in higher administration and organisation'. The National Council is thus consulted by the Treasury from time to time on questions affecting training. Two members of its staff side were, for instance, appointed to the Committee on the Training of Civil Servants already referred to; and when new measures in this field are suggested it is usually by agreement with the national staff side. At departmental level the interest taken in training varies according to the attitude of the respective official and staff representatives. In some departments the more conscious kinds of training are given considerable impetus by pressure from the staff side. In others the Departmental Whitley Council or its staff side does something indirectly to enlarge the horizons of the staff, by running lunch-time lectures, which are addressed by prominent figures from outside the service, and by taking similar initiatives from time to time. In general, a good Departmental Whitley Council ought to be able to back up an Establishment or Training Branch that is doing a good job, or to stimulate an office that is, for the time being, giving too little attention to this aspect of its affairs. It can scarcely be expected, however, to ensure that proper attention is given to training in every section of an office—still less to the training of each individual officer.

There is another and less obvious way in which Whitleyism can contribute to the training and conditioning of civil servants: it can help them—and so can the component associations of its staff side—by giving them opportunities to serve on committees and sub-committees and to meet and negotiate with people of greater experience and seniority,

inside and outside the office. A number of the present senior executive and junior administrative officers secured a great deal of their experience and training in this way, at a time when their official duties were, and seemed likely for many years to be, semi-mechanical and uninspiring. And many officers engaged on Establishment duties, and thus serving on the official side of Whitley Councils, are 'poachers turned gamekeeper' who were, in earlier days, members of staff sides. Whitleyism is a cautious, close-bargaining business, where everyone is conscious all the time that some of the highest cards are not on the table, but are carefully concealed up the sleeves of the official side; and it leaves its mark on some of its protagonists, rather as trade union politics outside the service do. But it has eased frustration and helped to reveal the potentialities of those whose lights might otherwise have continued to be hidden under various official bushels.

Officially, Whitleyism specialises in general service issues and leaves matters affecting particular grades largely to the staff associations concerned. The evidence given before the recent Royal Commission on the Civil Service provides an example of this, the question of hours and leave being dealt with by the National staff side and questions of pay being canvassed by the respective associations. At departmental level, the range of subjects that may theoretically be discussed depends on the constitution of the departmental council; but what is actually talked about depends in the last resort on what is troubling the staff at any particular time and on the willingness of the official side to listen, and possibly act on, what they have to say. There is usually a little higgling going on, with the staff side attempting to enlarge its sphere of intervention and the official side trying to avoid the discussion of matters which it thinks better kept in its own hands. Grading, complements, accommodation, welfare, redundancy, the establishment of temporary staff, retirement policy and, of course, promotion are perennial topics of discussion at Departmental, and frequently at National Whitley, level.

Usually, the role of the staff side is critical and inquisitive,

that of the official side defensive and reticent; and all but the most saintly of Establishment Officers are guilty, now and again, of doing something first and consulting the staff side later—as a result of which there are, generally, heated recriminations and a promise to try to do better next time—with the mental reservation, perhaps, that next time the circumstances will probably prove to be just a little different! The rules of this game are, of course, well understood by both sides, and good humour usually prevails in the end. The staff side know that if they stick to their guns they will probably get some part of what they want sooner or later, and the official side know that however hard the staff side bark they have usually no intention of trying to bite.

Sometimes, of course, a different mood will prevail and the official side will invite the staff side to co-operate constructively in some large-scale scheme of re-grading or reorganisation. After inspecting the invitation carefully to make sure they are not being asked to help their members to commit hara-kiri (they sometimes are!) the associations of the staff side will usually agree to take part. But they will often be embarrassed, on these and other occasions, by the conflicting interests of the various grades and classes they represent—a dilemma of which the official side will know how to take full advantage.

Probably the most obvious function of departmental Whitleyism is to let the staff blow off steam. It is also useful to the official side as a means of taking soundings on occasion, and possibly deciding which of two evils the staff would least object to. More positively, it does allow specific grievances to be aired and minor injustices and omissions to be attended to; and it prevents any gross victimisation or exploitation of groups or individuals. Further, it places certain restraints, sometimes salutary, sometimes petty and irksome, on supervisors who wish to move or redeploy staff. A senior executive officer who wished to have a man retired merely to get rid of him would have to reckon with the staff side. But so might one who wished a clerical officer to type an occasional urgent letter. Finally, in the chairman of the staff side, the Whitley system provides

a nominee of the staff who can take the chair, make polite speeches and give away prizes on those many semi-official occasions which help to ease the asperities of service life. A good staff side chairman can, moreover, sometimes whisper in the ear of the Head of Department necessary things which could not easily be conveyed to him in any other way!

The staff side of a Departmental Whitley Council is, generally speaking, much concerned with promotion prospects. Most civil servants are; and there is a canard which suggests that, where three or four of them are gathered together, one will usually be heard to be saying, apropos of it, 'Now take my case'. The staff associations are also closely concerned, and we shall discuss their interventions in this field later in this chapter. The associations are usually represented on the staff side, in proportion, more or less, to the numbers of staff they represent, by representatives chosen from within the office, but on occasion the bigger associations will send a full-time officer from headquarters to make some particular point. The First Division Association, which represents mainly administrative civil servants, stands a little aloof from the other associations. It has no professional secretary at headquarters, and its methods are on occasion somewhat more tentative than those of the other associations. It now belongs to the national staff side, but its branches are not always represented on departmental staff sides. In some small departments, where there are only a handful of administrative officers, it might be embarrassing if they were. The larger associations similarly reflect in their organisation and affiliations the status and interests of their members. The Civil Service Clerical Association is, for instance, a large and militant trade union with a strong full-time headquarters staff, friendly ties with a number of Members of Parliament and a penchant for hard-hitting publicity on a large scale. The Society of Civil Servants is, on the other hand, as befits an association representing the executives and other middle-grade civil servants, somewhat more restrained and decorous in its approach. But it is a firm and wide-awake negotiator, and the pages of its journal *Civil Service Opinion*, reveal that there are few aspects of the

civil service scene that escape the notice of its large and watchful membership.

Promotion is, as has been said, not merely something that occasionally exercises the staff side or the associations. It is, like freedom from capricious dismissal, part of the unwritten contract on the strength of which all administrators and professional and executive civil servants and most clericals and sub-clericals enter the service. No graduate would join the service in the expectation of remaining an assistant principal and no executive civil servant would seriously expect to remain a junior executive officer all his life. His salary is, indeed, adjusted to the assumption that he will not do so.

The hope, and indeed expectation, of promotion is accordingly something the civil servant, more than most men, lives with throughout his working life. The service is so graded and its salary scales so adjusted that failure to cross a particular promotion bridge at more or less the expected time may well represent a serious set-back, not only financially, but socially and personally; and the fact that, as we have seen, many of the opportunities for promotion that are available to the average civil servant come by way of internal selection means that his conduct and the quality of his work are frequently conditioned by the need to convince his superiors that he is well fitted for promotion from his existing grade.

It is this system of promotion from within, with its annual reports and occasional promotion boards, that does more perhaps than anything else to fix the attitude and harden the character of the average civil servant. It goes far, in many cases, to counter the complacency that might otherwise result from the civil servant's virtual immunity from arbitrary dismissal; but the movements of the promotion concertina vary according to the numbers and spacing of the various age groups, and to some extent, predetermine the career prospects of most junior civil servants. Predetermination of this kind is not generally good for people. It was not a good thing, for instance, that shortly before 1939 there were thoroughly competent men in the Post Office who knew that,

short of a cataclysm, there was no possibility of their getting promotion in that Department, and it does not make for initiative in a clerical officer if he or she knows that the chances of promotion in the next five or ten years are infinitesimal. These things are not, as far as can be ascertained, anyone's fault. They are part of a given situation in a large, stratified service, devoted in the main to the principle of first come, first served, in matters of promotion within the executive and clerical classes. But when they occur they cannot fail to have an unfortunate effect on the people concerned.

We shall see, however, as we examine the workings of the civil service promotion machinery in greater detail, that there are few officers for whom it ever comes completely and finally to a stop. For most of them it is rather like an irritatingly slow suburban train. It will pause between stations and come inexplicably to a standstill at the entrance to this or that tunnel. The victim will curse and will swear that he was an idiot to take this route at all, but there is no very obvious way of getting out, and he has always at the back of his mind that the terminus, or at least some acceptable destination, will be reached sooner or later. However often a civil servant has been 'passed over', however far removed he is from what is called the ambit of promotion, he seldom gives up hope. 'After all, look what happened to old Smith. . . . And what about Jones, who went as a clerical officer to the Ministry of . . .' The years after 1939 falsified so many pessimistic predictions, and the process of post-war deflation has been so protracted, that legitimate ambition still lives on in many official breasts. It is fortified in many by the fact that one has had to run very fast since the war to make one's real income keep pace with the cost of living. There must be many a senior executive officer who sighs for the days before the war, when he was, perhaps, an executive officer, but when his monthly pay seemed to go so much further.

Apart from these periodic halts and accelerations and the wartime and post-war expansion of the service, which have, as we have seen, deposited many existing civil servants

on platforms at which, some fifteen years ago, they could scarcely have hoped or expected to arrive, there are certain continuing features of the promotion processes of the service which it will be as well to consider at this stage. The first is that the keys to promotion in the important middle ranges of the service—to higher, senior and chief executive officer and, to a predominant extent, to principal and assistant secretary—are held by the departments and their component branches, not centrally by the Treasury or the Civil Service Commissioners. The second is that many of the officers who actually hold the keys at present belong to the broad band of senior executives and junior administrative officers described in Chapter I who have themselves been subjected to the inter-war compression and the subsequent stretching of the promotion concertina. They are men and women who had to knuckle down to routine jobs in their thirties and early forties, and it is obvious that in many cases their view as to what fits a man for promotion and as to when he is ready for it will differ from those of a senior officer who has had a smoother run through, from a university, say, via the forces, to the post he now occupies.

At lower levels the grip of the departments, and of the cohort of officers we have been describing, is weakened, partly by the limited examinations which enable many junior civil servants to gain promotion to clerical or executive officer level—usually to posts outside their own Department —and partly by the Treasury pool which does something to equalise the promotion prospects of clerical officers and executives; and at higher levels the situation is affected by the intervention of the Treasury in connexion with certain administrative appointments. But in the middle grades the situation is to some extent self-perpetuating. Like generally prefers like, and it is naturally enough an excellent qualification for promotion to resemble, or at least to appear to resemble, one's supervisors in make-up, approach to the work and general outlook.

The methods of intra-departmental selection for promotion are fairly well known, at least in outline. A man is reported on, usually once a year, by his supervisor, and the

report is countersigned by a senior officer. The custom is, for instance, for a higher executive officer to report on a junior executive and for a senior executive officer to countersign the report. The form of the report is, in substance, fairly uniform, though some officers still use variants of their own. It provides for the officer concerned to be assessed under a number of specific heads : knowledge of branch, knowledge of department, personality and force of character, judgment, power of taking responsibility, initiative, accuracy, address and tact, power of supervising staff, zeal and official conduct. The questions are to be answered on the basis of performance in the officer's existing grade; and there is a space for general remarks, including a note of any special qualification included in the list already mentioned. There is also provision for the officer's degree of fitness for promotion to be assessed under one of four headings—exceptionally well qualified, highly qualified, qualified or not yet qualified—and for supporting or explanatory remarks. There is provision for the countersigning officer to add his opinion. If an officer is given a bad report he must be told about it.

Reports of this kind have various minor uses—in connexion with probation and the passing of the 'efficiency bar', for instance, and these will be referred to briefly later. But their main use is, as their form suggests, to provide evidence of fitness for promotion. The intention is, of course, that the reports should be comparable, and should make it possible for senior officers to decide as between rival candidates, possibly without seeing the candidates. Their usefulness for this purpose depends in the first place on the judgment of the reporting and countersigning officers, and in the second place on there being some central machinery for co-ordinating the reports and ironing out the differences arising merely from the personal idiosyncrasies of the reporters. As to the first, it can only be said that the qualifications of reporting officers for reporting on their staff vary within the service from 'Exceptionally well qualified' to 'Not yet qualified—and possibly never will be!' In a service which has recruited its supervisors and promoted them by such a

variety of routes, and is as large and loosely knit as the present civil service, it would be surprising if it were otherwise. There are officers whose geese are always swans and others who habitually take a pessimistic view of the human material under their control. And there are some whose reports on junior staff contain such internal inconsistencies as to make their conclusions highly suspect. Furthermore, it is obvious that, with the best will in the world, it is difficult for reporting officers to be quite sure what is wanted, or how to distribute praise and blame, under such heads as 'Zeal' and 'Initiative'. There have been moves to vary the form of report, so as to give a more helpful picture of the individual, but, whatever is done in this direction, the difficulty of assembling and giving due weight to a multiplicity of subjective judgments will remain.

There is in most offices no very formal machinery for co-ordinating the reports. In some, the process of levelling up, or down, as the case may be, depends on the reputation of the reporting officers : Mr. Smith may be known as a hard marker; Miss Jones may be thought to be unduly generous. In others there is a small committee of heads of sections which may call upon supervisors who seem more than usually out of line, in one direction or the other, to justify their reports. This will usually involve some cross-questioning and may mean that the supervisor is asked to produce samples of the work of the officer concerned. There is also a certain safeguard in the fact that junior officers will generally move about and will be reported on by different supervisors, who will not normally have seen the earlier reports.

The interests of equity are also served by the fact that where promotion to executive officer level or above is concerned there is almost always a 'board'. In other words, some at least of the candidates in the field will usually be seen by a promotion board, which will thus have some opportunity of checking the validity of the reports given to these particular officers. In some cases, however, the decision as to whether an officer is to be interviewed will be taken on the basis of his report. Thus, if his supervisor has said

that he is not yet fitted for promotion, he may not have an opportunity of convincing the board that this is an unreasonable verdict.

Generally, when promotions are in the offing, the Establishment Officer or one of his deputies will begin by deciding who is 'in the ambit'—in other words, how far down the seniority list of the grade concerned it is advisable to look on this occasion. This decision will usually be communicated to the staff side, who may well challenge it—usually in the sense that it is proposed to go too far down, thus prejudicing the chances of the more senior candidates, in the interests, possibly, of some 'blue-eyed boy' who is very junior in the grade. The next step will generally be to draw up a short-list of people to be seen or otherwise considered for the post or posts that are vacant. This process may well involve the exclusion of some senior people who have bad reports or who have been seen and passed over previously. At this stage, too, in some offices, the staff side, though it will not see the reports, will be given an opportunity of suggesting that other names should be added to the list. It may take the view, for instance, that a senior member of the grade who has not been seen because of his report or who has been turned down by an earlier board should be given another chance. When the list has been settled and the candidates are interviewed, each will usually be given an initial allowance of marks for his report—which thus pursues him even into the interview.

It is only fair to say that the service reporting system, with all its faults, probably does much less harm than good. It provides an element of continuity and makes it possible to depart from strict seniority with a view to recruiting to higher posts people who have shown promise. And, if used wisely by an interviewing board, it makes it possible for a candidate's strengths and weaknesses to be tested at a relatively short interview by officers who are not always particularly expert at work of this kind. The boards for promotion to executive officer or higher executive officer are usually composed of senior executives and junior administrators, the older of whom will have seen many boards, in one

capacity or another and will usually know how to get perhaps rather more than a fair share of their own way. In a small office the members of the board may know a number of the candidates personally, and in a large office they may know one or two. But the written reports, and any supplementary remarks, good or bad, which have found their way on to the candidates' papers will help them to put personalities aside and make a fresh start if, as is almost always the case, they wish to do so. Further, if a man is given a bad report, he is warned about it; and this will usually give him an opportunity of having a straight talk with his immediate supervisor and possibly of remedying the faults complained of, or seeking a transfer to a new section.

The ordinary annual reports are supplemented at certain stages of a civil servant's career by special reports. Thus, a man will usually be reported on at the end of his period of probation in a new grade and also when he reaches the point in his salary scale when he must be pronounced fit to perform the highest duties of his grade. These hurdles are not usually formidable in practice, except in the case of the probation of an assistant principal, which, if passed successfully, will open the way for him to enter the principal grade of the service, and is accordingly watched over fairly carefully by the Civil Service Commissioners. There are also special reports in respect of civil servants over sixty years of age, whose heads of branch are asked, usually at six-monthly intervals, whether they are still capable of performing the highest duties of their grade. If there is any doubt about this, or if the needs of the office appear to require it, these officers, who are staying on past retirement age, may be asked to revert to a lower grade. Even so, by retiring, being re-engaged and adding pay to pension, they can usually make up their income to its former level.

It is difficult to say how far the promotion processes of the service, and in particular the regular check provided by the reporting system, counterbalance the fact that an established civil servant—unless he makes a complete fool of himself—has a job for life. Between the wars, when very few junior civil servants were anywhere near the ambit

of promotion, the security factor clearly carried much weight, and a certain stodginess, which has come to be thought characteristic of the service, developed.

The rapid promotion and general uncertainty of the war years and the continuance of full employment up to the present time have somewhat altered the balance, and it is now doubtful whether the position of the civil servant in this respect is markedly different at the clerical and executive levels from that of people doing broadly comparable work in large organisations outside the service. These too, have, in general, pensions schemes and welfare arrangements, and in practice offer little less in the way of security than the public service. At the administrative level there is still, of course, a marked difference. The administrative civil servant, while probably enjoying less freedom than a man who is teaching in a school or university, is able to follow his own philosophical bent and if he chooses his words wisely to indulge in the habit of telling his masters things that are good for them rather more than members of the top management of many—though not all—business undertakings. But, on the other hand, he has to be content with considerably less pay. Whether the gaps between civil servants and others will open up again at the lower levels it is hard to say. Much depends on the general level of employment on the one hand and on the development of the service's promotion and training processes on the other. In this respect the prospects are not, perhaps, very encouraging. The days of rapid promotion are now fast drawing to an end. The average age of promotion to each of the main service grades is rising, and a period of stagnation, not unlike that between the wars, would almost certainly set in within the next five or ten years if nothing were done about it.

CHAPTER IV

Methods

We have to consider in this chapter the effect of matériel on personnel—a study which might not promise, at first sight, to be particularly rewarding, in the areas of the home civil service, with which we are primarily concerned. There are sectors of the public service, it might be argued—the Foreign Office, the Post Office, the Ordnance Factories and parts of the Stationery Office, for instance—where the nature of the work, its physical characteristics and the conditions in which it must be done have a striking effect on personality. Diplomacy, as a career, is likely, one might suggest, to leave its mark. Postmen, one might say, are—like miners, dockers and railwaymen—fashioned and conditioned by the nature of their daily tasks. But surely not the various grades of non-industrial civil servants we are considering here! These are office-workers, with the occupational characteristics of office-workers. That is all we know, or need to know, about them.

There is some point in this argument so far as the administrative class is concerned, but much less than there would have been twenty years ago. At that time the theory that administrators were concerned with ends and other civil servants with means was to some extent borne out in practice. It was then sometimes possible for a principal or assistant secretary to limit his activities largely to the exchange of minutes, to the drafting of letters and memoranda and to participation in an occasional important interview—activities which might have been conducted almost equally well at his home or club. Nowadays, as we have seen, the urgencies and complexities of official life, the habit of oral

consultation with the executives and the part senior officers are expected to play in management of staff make it desirable that junior administrators should have some knowledge of how, at what speed, by whom and with what degree of accuracy things are likely to be done. It is not generally possible for an administrative civil servant nowadays even to pretend that he can draw a sharp line between ends and means—between policy, which is his business, and methods which he can safely leave to someone else.

At the executive and clerical levels it becomes increasingly obvious that if non-industrial civil servants are indeed mostly office-workers, they are office-workers whose daily tasks and the instruments with which they are performed are such as to leave a peculiar stamp upon them. The iron of the service routine goes deeper, as one would expect, in the lower grades, where tasks are more often repetitive and there is more scope for habit and experience and less necessity to take thought—for the day or for the morrow. And it is important to remember that, as we have seen, the majority of civil servants of middle and higher rank carry within them—occasionally ill-concealed—dustier and somewhat more empirical characters who have spent their formative years in the atmosphere of the lower grades of the service.

What, then, are the ingredients of this special atmosphere, and how is it that it transcends the fairly sharp departmental divisions that we have noticed when considering other matters affecting service personnel? Accommodation is one; stores and stationery comprise another and a third may be distinguished by the general title 'Organisation and Methods'. They cut across departmental divisions, for a number of reasons, which we shall have to consider in detail. Among the more obvious of these is that the Ministry of Works, the Stationery Office, and, above all, the Treasury, exercise a certain co-ordinating influence in their respective fields and, to some extent, act as transmitters of parliamentary and public opinion in these matters, and, in certain respects, as reflectors of the attitudes of Ministers and of the staff associations. In this, as in other respects, the service is not

yet a unified whole. There are within it numerous variations of practice, which are traditional rather than functional, but there is also a continuing tendency towards simplification and standardisation. This is now gaining the upper hand within the service, although new departures from conformity occur from time to time in the nationalised undertakings and other organisations on its fringes.

Of civil service accommodation the first thing to be noted is that a very great part of it is makeshift. A civil servant now in his mid-thirties may well have sampled already a First World War army hut, a warren-like office building in Kingsway, one of the South Kensington Museums, a requisitioned provincial hotel, a Regency house in a formerly fashionable London square and an office in Whitehall; and among the older civil servants there can be few who have not spent a great proportion of their service lives in accommodation whose original function was very different from that of housing servants of the Crown. It may be objected that other large organisations have experienced similar difficulties, particularly since the war curtailed the provision of office accommodation. But there is no single outside organisation employing clerical and executive staff on the same scale, and there is no similar body that has expanded so massively in the period since 1939. Furthermore, even before the Second World War, the housing of the service bore little relation to the functions it was currently performing. Much of the accommodation which the Office of Works, as it then was, had at its disposal dated either from the days when large and imposing effects were more sought after than fitness for purpose or from a time when the exigencies of the First World War made it necessary to put up huts in the courtyards of Whitehall and to adopt other cheap and, as it was intended, temporary devices. There is also the point that the Crown does not, for various historical reasons, pay an economic rent for much of this obsolescent accommodation. Somerset House, for instance, or parts of Greenwich Palace, may not be well suited to the needs of public departments, but it would be hard to say that they should be evacuated and accommodation built or rented for the

officials who now occupy them. The same consideration applies, in a less degree, to some of the buildings in and about Whitehall.

Another factor which ties the hands of those responsible for accommodating civil servants and helps to make the rooms they are housed in a biased sample of all office accommodation is that certain branches and departments have to be close to Ministers, who, in turn, still find it necessary to spend a considerable proportion of their time in the vicinity of Westminster. This means that the very great majority of senior civil servants must spend their official lives in central London and must reside either in, or near, the metropolis. Almost all administrative civil servants must become, sooner or later, Londoners. Even where, as in the case of the Ministry of Pensions and National Insurance, most of the executive and clerical work is done in the provinces there is usually a small head-quarters staff in London—a physical separation which, in itself, imposes certain limitations on the organisation of the Department. Naturally, this factor operates with much less force at the lower levels, and much of the temporary development that took place during the war is reflected in the outposts of junior, and often temporary, staff scattered in places like Rhyl, Southport, Bath and Blackpool, to which civil servants were moved during the war. The siting of government offices at Newcastle, on the other hand, was a conscious political act. So, too, in a different context, was the opening of certain government offices in Cardiff. These developments and also the provision of local and regional offices, have resulted in a situation where only about one-third of all non-industrial civil servants are on London rates of pay. But most of the weight is still at the centre. Almost all the administrators are still there. So are many of the more senior executives. Promotion still frequently draws a man to London; and there is still a presumption that any senior civil servant will spend the greater part of his career working in the metropolis. While the requisitioned country house or provincial hotel or Nissen hut now forms part of the pattern of accommodation for the junior and temporary grades of the service,

it is the older buildings of Whitehall, the rented office blocks and the new government buildings in Holborn and Westminster that are likely to set their stamp upon their seniors.

As regards the use of such accommodation as there is, the Ministry of Works and the Establishment Branches of the departments concerned, and occasionally the Cabinet and the Treasury take a hand. Once a Department has been allocated a particular building, its own inertia, so to speak, will generally keep it there, unless, in the case of enviable accommodation, a department with a more assertive Minister, or, in the case of an unusually undesirable building, pressure exercised by its own Minister, alters the position. Sometimes expansion or contraction will bring about a move, but most of the older Departments have their own central fastnesses from which they can scarcely be ejected no matter how the less important or less senior offices may move about the periphery.

The disposition of staff within a given Department is primarily in the hands of the Director of Office Services, who is one of the outriders of the Establishment Branch, but who is watched over to some extent by the Ministry of Works and, in some respects, by the Treasury. In practice, many departments are rather like certain South American destroyers, which must appear to those serving in them to have been built round the captain's stateroom—a gun or two, or a torpedo tube being added here or there, rather as an afterthought. The Minister and his staff have to be looked after first. Then, of course, suitable rooms must be found for the most senior officials and for the Establishment Branch, which is necessarily at the centre of things. If there are any large rooms they generally go to the typing pool and to the central registry, where there is one. Files and stores go in the basement; so, probably, does the staff canteen. A cubby-hole or two near the front door may perhaps be found for the public, and the rest of the building is devoted to the branches. Most officers at senior executive officer level and above will have a room of their own, or at worst share one with a colleague. Junior officers will, with few exceptions, be housed

in larger rooms, containing perhaps half a dozen, perhaps twenty or thirty people. Usually the higher executive officer or other immediate supervisor will share a room with his staff or some of them. But this is not always the case. Much depends on the accommodation and the nature of the work.

Standards vary, as has been said, from office to office, but it is usually not difficult for a practised observer to make a fair estimate of a man's grade by his accommodation, and more particularly by his furniture. Standards are laid down for this, but not always observed, partly because there has been a shortage of good quality furniture since the days of war-time removals and expansion, and partly because, as regards such things as desks and carpets, possession is occasionally nine points of the law. Nevertheless, if one walked into an assistant secretary's room in his absence, one could, in most cases, form some idea of its owner's rank. The desk would, in all probability, be of good, dark wood. There would be a carpet and an armchair for the visitor, a book-case and possibly a side-table with half a dozen chairs for small, informal meetings. Similarly, if one found himself in a largish room with a dozen standard desks, one or two deal tables and racks cluttered up with files or empty foolscap envelopes one would know that one was among junior executive or clerical staff.

There are, of course, traps for the unwary. Members of Establishment Branches, and, in particular, Directors of Office Services, are generally no less adept at looking after themselves so far as accommodation is concerned than were war-time quartermasters and supply officers. And private secretaries and personal assistants usually reflect in their accoutrements something of the glory of their masters. In the provinces, too, the senior executive staff is frequently housed in quarters that would excite the envy of some of its colleagues in the metropolis. There are exceptions the other way too. A principal who likes peace and quiet may accept a remote but rather unworthy room, or a professional civil servant who has no senior officer in the main stream of events to speak for him may find himself tucked away, somewhat ingloriously, in an attic.

All in all, as we shall see more clearly when we come to consider organisation and methods, accommodation is of importance in the service not only as a badge of rank and as a determinant of creature habits but as a factor in staff relations and in the attitude that the junior staff bring to their work. As regards staff relations it would be difficult to over-estimate the potential importance of accommodation. It was the improvised accommodation of war-time and the re-housing and consequent thrusting together of formerly distinct classes that contributed more perhaps than any other single factor to the unfreezing of the formerly rigid social barriers between the administrative and other classes. A man who sits two doors away, shares the same telephone directory and eats in the same canteen is more likely to give and take in the daily associations of official life, more likely to suggest, less likely to direct, than the remote individual whom his pre-war juniors sometimes glimpsed at the far end of a Whitehall corridor.

Similarly, it can scarcely be denied that the air of improvisation which, unfortunately, still characterises a great deal of the accommodation allocated to the clerical staff has its effect on their work. There is little incentive to make the rooms in question look like offices. Screens are imported to cure draughts. Racks, backed with brown paper, are adapted to the same purpose, personal belongings, dead files and cracked tea cups accumulate in odd corners and the atmosphere begins to resemble that of a rooming house rather than an office. Good work may be done in these surroundings, and frequently is. The offices in question may be hives of efficiency. But they do not look it. And their effect on that most subtle of things, office morale, and on the work of newcomers, can scarcely be good. This is a great pity; and, unfortunately, there is no simple or cheap solution. It is said, for instance, that a senior civil servant returned recently from the United States full of enthusiasm for the American practice of seating supervisors behind their staff, looking over their shoulders, as it were, rather like the bow oar of a rowing eight. He caused this practice to be adopted, at some considerable expense and inconvenience,

throughout his own office, and sat back confidently to wait for improved output. The only discernible effect of these arrangements, however, was a violent protest by the staff side, who pointed out, among other things, that the changes had had the effect of giving the most junior staff the best seats, near the windows. The former order of seating has now been restored.

From accommodation and furniture it is a short step to files, forms, minute sheets and to the other impedimenta which contribute to the daily background of civil service life. We shall discuss these later, in the light of their contribution to service methods, but it is worth considering first their impact merely as things, to be seen, used, consulted and passed from hand to hand, from day to day and from year to year. The sheer volume of paper and the sheer quantity of paper-work in the non-industrial civil service are staggering. It has been estimated that two-thirds of the time of all non-industrial civil servants is spent doing paper-work. The handling of files, the reading and writing of minutes, the reduction of problems of all shapes and sizes to the confines of a foolscap file, or to a number of them, which can be taped together and passed into an out-tray, has become something more than a method. It is an unescapable ingredient of service life; and it is a sound instinct on the part of the press and the public that makes them focus so much attention on the official file and characterise certain familiar service processes as 'red tape'.

It is, of course, necessary that civil servants should have their files about them. Any large organisation doing work of this kind must keep records for various essential purposes; and the service is by no means alone in finding that making the right decisions about such things—keeping not too many, not too few and indexing them clearly but economically—is a difficult and dismayingly complicated business. Few organisations manage it properly. There is almost always too much paper, and few people within a given department can ever find their way quickly and confidently about the filing system. By comparison with the systems of some international bodies and certain industrial firms, those

used in the civil service are not unduly elaborate. Nor are they, on the whole, inefficient. But they exist, they multiply and, like all large paper systems, they show a continuous tendency to become unduly complicated. Paper breeds paper; the more files there are, the more files there need be. Fat files are filled with minutes about files, and brave new decisions drop like stones and are lost among existing precedents.

These things have not gone unnoticed in the service. There are rules about destroying documents, and the difficulty of moving files during the war and the cost of storing them in central London since have taught many lessons. But old habits die hard. Many civil servants still lean, and teach their subordinates to lean, on paper decisions, wherever this is at all possible. Sometimes there are good reasons for this, as we shall see later on when we consider the civil servant's dealings with people outside the service. But sometimes the decision referred to has no special merit or relates to a situation slightly different from the one that has to be dealt with; and in these cases reference to the file is made merely from habit or laziness—or because the officer concerned has grown used to having files about him and feels a little diffident about proceeding without some paper record as a point of departure. It is tempting to go on doing this sort of thing, because it is familiar and appears at first sight economical of time and thought and also because it is the expected thing and shelters one from criticism. But it is difficult to do so without blunting one's power to take one's own decisions and to look at situations afresh and on their merits. We shall see later that there are clear and excellent reasons for keeping specific kinds of files and that the anarchist slogan 'incinerate the documents' quoted, not perhaps without approval, by Lewis Mumford in his 'Culture of Cities' would not quite do for the civil service. It is conceivable, however, that a somewhat modified injunction, 'incinerate most of the documents' might be adopted with salutary effects in many departments.

Civil servants not only keep files for reference and as repositories for correspondence. They write minutes in them,

and they also draw up memoranda. Neither of these habits is confined to the service, of course, but both are generally held to be characteristic of it. The comic or inordinately long minute is usually the *pièce de résistance* of humorous articles about officials, and the serious attention that is paid to minute writing in some official quarters is, in its way, rather comic too. It would frequently be more to the point if civil servants were taught, with some care, how to avoid writing minutes, and if the more senior of them were encouraged so to arrange matters that minute writing by their subordinates was kept to a minimum. Letters, if left alone, often speak well for themselves; senior officers, if close at hand, can frequently be consulted orally, their decision being noted briefly on the file; or, better still, the whole matter can sometimes be decided at a lower level, without any minuting at all.

Much is being done in this direction, as will be seen later, in various parts of the service. The tide is moving in the direction of brevity, informality and the taking of reasonable risks and short cuts. But it is not moving very rapidly, and cannot do so, partly because of the nature of the work and the position of the service *vis-à-vis* Parliament, the press and various outside bodies and individuals, but partly, also, because of the weight of its traditions and their effect on the staff.

Everyone knows, if he stops to think, whether a file need be opened or added to, whether a minute of such and such a length or character is necessary, whether, if he gets someone to set out the facts in a memorandum, he will really use it. But civil servants, generally, like many of their counterparts outside the service, are not in the habit of stopping to think about such things. If they happen to be concerned with organisation and methods they often are, of course. Things of this kind are their special subject. But for the most part they go on dealing with the subject matter within the accepted framework, carefully and conscientiously, and having little time to spare for radical reconsideration of the way things are done. The busier and better of them, the more adept at working the existing

machine, are frequently those with least sympathy for the view that it might be changed. 'Why bother us', they ask, implicitly. 'Our piece of the machinery is working reasonably well. We aren't interested in theoretical experiments.'

There is something in this, of course. A good man can get used to a bad system; and, having once learned to ride a one-wheeled cycle, one might not feel the need for anything different. Indeed, an attempt to change to a bicycle might prove temporarily embarrassing for all concerned. Nevertheless, there are points at which innovations can suitably be introduced, and very frequently Organisation and Methods Officers or energetic heads of branches are able to see that this is done. But it is necessarily a patchwork business. The service has a multiplicity of old and well-tried methods, which were introduced before the typewriter and other office machines had been developed and before the pace and scope of official business had reached their present proportions. The writing of manuscript minutes on foolscap or quarto paper is one of them. Civil servants from top to bottom of the service, but particularly those in the middle grades, spend a great deal of their time writing such minutes and drafting manuscript letters, which are later copied by typists and sent back to them, or to some senior officer, for signature. For a principal to keep a typewriter in his room and use it, as an officer of comparable rank in the United States might well do, would be almost unthinkable. And, what is more to the point, it is still only very rarely that a member of the clerical or executive classes is a proficient typist, or, if he is, is given a machine to use in the course of his daily work.

Typing, in the civil service, is almost everywhere divorced from the work of the branches, whether this is executive or clerical. Assistant secretaries and more senior officers have personal assistants who are usually typists, but officers of principal rank and below generally have to depend on a typing pool, which may be housed at some distance from them and may take a day or two to turn round all but the most urgent letters, minutes and memoranda. Unless the minutes are particularly long, therefore, the officer will

usually put them on the file in manuscript—a habit which may put considerable strain on the eyesight and patience of his colleagues—not to mention his successors. The typing pool, which is perhaps an heirloom of the days when women were rare in the service and it was felt desirable to segregate them in a large room under the watchful eye of a lady supervisor, is sometimes said to be an economical way of using typists. In the short run, it is, of course. The girls need seldom be idle. If Mr. Brown does not want something typed, Miss Smith will. But few typists like working in typing pools, and many of the more efficient find their way out of them, either by getting jobs outside or by promotion within the service. There are, in fact, excellent former typists at all levels of the executive and clerical classes who seldom, if ever, touch a key. At the same time, little attempt has been made to encourage clerical officers as a grade to make themselves proficient as typists or short-hand writers, and any serious attempt to do so at this stage would probably incur considerable criticism from the staff associations. Yet it is obvious that there are certain circumstances where training and morale, as well as speedy handling of correspondence, would be greatly assisted if there were a small, flexible typing staff within the branch able to turn its hand at need to simple clerical duties, understanding what was being typed and seeing the need for urgency in certain cases.

The same considerations apply to registries. Official opinion has sometimes favoured large registries in principle and sometimes small ones. But the truth seems to be that the size of the registry and the nature of the filing system should be finely—and fairly frequently—adjusted to the nature of the work which the office or its various branches needs to do. There ought, in other words, to be a constant and conscious effort to make and keep the registry suitable for the task it has to perform. It is done in some offices. But in the service, as outside it, there are many areas where mechanics of this kind are given little attention and become, in course of time, stiff and awkward and impede the conduct of business.

There is, of course, nothing new about this. The methods

used by the service to do its more mechanical work and the atmosphere in which this work was conducted have never been uniformly good. And there have always been new brooms. As long ago as 1842 we find the newly appointed head of one of the smaller offices calling attention to the 'lax manner in which many gentlemen have performed their duties' and promising that the rules would be rigidly enforced in future. And we learn, from the summary of the minutes issued by this same officer that 'all clerks in future on entering this office are to be examined by the Chief Clerk as to competency in writing, spelling, etc.' We find him a few years later 'pleased to see that gentlemen have to a great extent discontinued reading newspapers in office hours', and, lest there should be back-sliding, decreeing 'that no refreshments are to be brought into the office except between the hours of twelve and two o'clock'. But this degree of attention to detail would appear to have been unusual in Heads of Departments, and a certain unevenness in the quality of the clerical work and a disregard for the length of the interval between the receipt of correspondence and the despatch of an effective reply would seem to have persisted well into the present century.

Between the wars it was not uncommon for departments to have large central registries and correspondence sections, and these were frequently used as training grounds for new staff, but partly also as repositories for old, worn out and, in various ways, unsatisfactory officers. If a clerk quarrelled with his superiors or was caught out in some minor breach of discipline he would quickly find himself in the registry, and unlikely, but for some major turn of fortune, to emerge from it in a hurry. He might be engaged there in opening letters or despatching them, in noting on cards the contents of in-coming letters or in the even more menial task of pursuing and accounting for lost papers or misplaced files.

The surroundings in which these duties were performed were seldom inspiring and it may, perhaps, be worth pausing to describe in some detail the appointments of one of the medium-sized departments to which young clerical officers

straight from school were being appointed shortly before the Second World War. The receipt of correspondence and, in particular, the custody of enclosures, was looked after in those days by two clerks whose room formed, as it were, an antechamber to the typing pool. The typists sat within, in serried ranks, as if at school, under the eye of a lady whose role *vis-à-vis* her charges is probably not now paralleled anywhere in this country, except, perhaps, by that of the matron in an old-fashioned hospital. It was seldom, indeed, that any woman except the martinet herself appeared outside the typing room or that any man except one of the two custodians ventured into its fastnesses.

In a large room nearby was housed the registry proper, comprising perhaps twenty-five or thirty clerks. Eight or nine of these were 'abstract clerks', responsible between them for the higher duties of the registry, which comprised abstracting the contents of incoming letters and recording them on cards, with a note of the sender's name, and also deciding on what file they were to be placed. They performed this work at a leisurely pace and with varying degrees of competence. One of them at this time was an eccentric who would work only for a few favoured superiors, another was a young man from the north of England still in the first year of his service apprenticeship, another was a broken-down Shakespearean actor, on whose bald pate, as he slept after lunch, his juniors were apt to experiment with their rubber stamps, and yet another was an old fellow with a wooden leg whose huge script, written as if with a brush, sprawled illegibly across the cards. This last deficiency was less vital than might be thought, since it was only in the rarest circumstances—when a file had been lost and urgent action was demanded—that anyone bothered to refer to the abstract cards.

Much more frequent reference was made to a parallel series of cards whose function was to record the whereabouts of files. These cards were maintained by clerical assistants or junior clerical officers, who sat day by day, minding great trays full of them, and acting generally as the acolytes of the abstract clerks. These cards were consulted—with

varying success—not only by the registry clerks themselves but by emissaries sent urgently, on occasion, from the branches. Where the system failed, as it often did, or a file was needed more quickly than the normal methods of the abstract clerks seemed likely to produce it, recourse would usually be had to the staff clerk in charge of the registry, who was, unfortunately, seldom to be found at his desk—so frequent were his expeditions to the basement or elsewhere in search of missing or urgently needed files. Or, if all failed, and the file was finally pronounced lost, its number would be noted on the lists of one of the search clerks—a race of men and women whose continuous and invidious task it was to search through the branches and the rooms of individual officers for papers missing from the registry and, so far as could be discovered, from the room of the officer or section to whom they had been 'charged out'.

This registry, and others like it, were commonly regarded as good training grounds for junior clerical staff, and it was thought that a year or so in the registry or on some similar job in another part of the office was an excellent preliminary training and introduction to the work of the Department—of which, so far as the more mechanical processes were concerned, it was considered to be the backbone. It was, of course, true that the registry formed an excellent vantage point and that a junior clerk employed there might well rub up against the juniors of many other sections and gain some notion of the subject matter of their work. He might also learn to find his way—physically—about the Department, which, in some cases, was no mean feat. But the methods he observed and the examples he was called upon to follow were not, with few exceptions, likely to be helpful to him later in his career.

It was not, therefore, upon a uniformly efficient system that the strains of the Second World War, the reshuffling and expansion of the service, the employment problems of the war and post-war period and the other mechanical difficulties which the service is struggling to overcome had their impact. The organisation of filing systems, typing and the handling of correspondence was a patchy business even before

the employment of temporary clerks was necessitated by the war, and those who have been responsible for these matters in recent years have not inherited an unexceptionable set of arrangements. It is against this background that we have to consider how the Organisation and Methods Branch of the Treasury and the comparable branches of other departments have gone about their business and what measure of success they have had in leavening the official lump.

Organisation and Methods is not, of course, a new tool, and it is not one invented by, or confined in its operation to, the service. The most that can be said is that since the last war the need for a detailed and methodical approach to such things as registries, files, forms and clerical procedures has been more obvious and more generally appreciated than formerly, and that considerable thought has been given to the problem of providing it. The Organisation and Methods Branch of the Treasury, the comparable branches of the larger departments and the Methods Officers of certain smaller departments represent the main part of the answer so far provided, and it may be useful to examine here, not so much their own methods, which have been fully described elsewhere, as the nature and extent of their impact on the work of the service and on the attitude of its personnel.

The Treasury is the pacemaker in this field, and its officers are frequently given assignments in the smaller departments, which generally have no adequate staff of their own for dealing with such matters. These assignments are arranged in the first place through the Heads of Departments and their Establishment Officers, and the scope of the enquiry to be conducted is usually hammered out at, or about, assistant secretary level. At a later stage the officer in charge of the assignment, who may well be a high-ranking member of the executive class, will discuss the assignment in more detail with the principals or senior executive officers in charge of the branches concerned. These preliminary meetings are ticklish affairs on both sides. The departmental officers, or some of them, may quite possibly start with the impression that they and their arrangements are, to some extent, on

trial and that it is part of their business to impress, if not deceive, the examiners. The Assignment Officer, and his assistants, if they are present, will be aware of this and will try to make it clear that the role of Organisation and Methods is, at least formally, purely advisory and that any flaws they may find will demonstrate merely their greater experience in this special field and will not reflect on the efficiency of the Department. But they will know, what the departmental officers suspect, that there are marginal areas in which the Department ought in a sense to be on its mettle and in which it may well be that there will be something of a trial of strength if opinions conflict later on. There is a point, in other words, where Organisation and Methods touches on domestic policy, and a no-man's land in which an efficient Assignment Officer may well have views, but in which, equally, a watchful Department will wish to keep full control. There is no general solution to this difficulty; and in practice much will depend on the common-sense and restraint shown on both sides in the course of the assignment, much of which will be undertaken at a lower and in some ways less difficult level. If the members of the Organisation and Methods team go about their enquiries tactfully, and make it clear to the higher executive officers, executive officers and others they have to interview that they are experts at their own trade, they will have established a fair amount of goodwill by the time their draft report is submitted to the head of the branch or division concerned.

In this period the Assignment Officer and the heads of the various branches will usually have met from time to time to discuss the *raison d'être* of various parts of the office and perhaps to exchange informal views as to the functioning of—or even the necessity for—certain parts of the machinery. As a by-product of these meetings there will usually have emerged a fair understanding on both sides as to what the other is about. The Assignment Officer will know how well the branches are working and to what extent their senior officers are in the saddle. The heads of branches, on the other hand, will probably have formed some view as to the sort of suggestions that can be expected to arise from the

enquiry. If all goes well, it will therefore be possible, when the circumstances demand it, for the draft report of the Organisation and Methods team either to trench on policy or at least to be so framed as to complement or stimulate what is already being done, or is proposed to be done, in the branches. Conversely, it will be possible for the departmental officers to warn the Assignment Officer when he is treading on dangerously thin ice and to help him to avoid recommendations that they know or feel from experience to be unhelpful. Obviously co-operation of this kind—a meeting of minds between the expert and the resident administrator—is essential if an Organisation and Methods assignment is not to be confined to minute or mechanical matters or to be bogged down in prestige disputes. It can also make a considerable contribution to the spirit in which any recommendations which may be finally accepted are applied and to the extent to which they are effective. Without it most of the life goes out of the assignment and a great deal of the time and money spent on it may be wasted.

But even if co-operation at the working level is fully earned and freely given, there are still pitfalls. The principal or chief executive or senior executive officer in charge of the branch may, though willing, be insufficiently experienced to help, or his ideas may cut across those of the Establishment Officer or Head of Department. He may even be found to have, perhaps unconsciously, enlisted the officers responsible for the assignment on his side in some domestic conflict of opinion. Or it may be found, when the report of the Organisation and Methods team comes to be discussed with a view to action, that a temporary increase of staff or possibly new legislation would be required before the proposals, or some of them, could be implemented.

There is also a danger that the assignment team may be misled by the Department as to the real needs of the public or other 'consumer' of the service which is being reviewed. They are, after all, civil servants themselves, and, unless they are consciously on guard all the time, are quite likely, as they become immersed in the detailed affairs of a Department, to begin to take an institutional view of it, to ask

the question 'how' and to neglect, on occasion, the prior question 'why'. They are intended to ask this question, as the literature makes clear; and they are supposed to pause initially and ask themselves whether the work they are examining really has to be done, whether the results achieved are worth the effort and whether the public interest could not be better served in some other way. But it is not easy (as we have seen) for them to pursue this sort of questioning to its logical conclusion. They are strangers to the work, they cannot pit their knowledge of the subject-matter against that of the residents with any hope of more than an occasional success, and they are not generally sufficiently high in rank to carry their arguments far if they are met by opposition from within the Department.

This means that, except in the large Departments with their own Organisation and Methods Branches, which will be considered later, the use of this new tool is limited and dependent, in the last resort, on the goodwill of various people in the Departments. It may be said that this is quite right, that constitutional propriety requires that the Minister and, under him, the official Head of the Department, should be masters in their own house. They are responsible for the efficient working of the Department and, for any matter bearing on policy, they must be, and must be seen to be, fully responsible. Organisation and Methods is, by its own admission, the argument may continue, a means of obtaining technical advice on organisation and on the promotion of effectiveness in relation to cost, should be used, at the discretion of the responsible departmental officers, in areas where mechanical procedures are common, and should not concern itself with matters of policy.

The practical difficulty about this argument is that, as we have noticed, ends cannot easily be separated from means in the public service and there is no neatly parcelled commodity which can conveniently be labelled 'policy'. In practice the injunction laid upon Assignment Officers to study the objectives and functions of the Department they are reviewing in the light of their place in the whole field of government and to bear in mind that 'ready-made statements

of objectives are not always satisfactory' and that 'what pass as objectives of a unit are on occasion little more than what people have got used to doing' would undoubtedly, if great tact and restraint were not exercised, frequently bring them across the bows of the departmental officers. Even simple and apparently superficial suggestions about work flows and filing systems and the retention or abandonment of various procedures are frequently based on judgments about more weighty matters which the adviser may have formed for himself or borrowed in part from the officers of the Department, and some of his recommendations may depend on other long-term changes which he has been led to believe may be taking place in the Department, or on the spirit in which he is assured certain Acts or regulations will be administered.

All this means that if an assignment is carried out, a report made and formally accepted in whole or in part, by the Department, and the team withdraws, the responsibility for putting the recommendations into effect and making such adjustments as the circumstances may require is substantially in the hands of officers who have no experience, and may well have little interest in Organisation and Methods. There may be some follow-up, and the Establishment Officer, if he is not too busy, may take an active interest in the carrying out of the recommendations, but substantially this will be in the hands of the officers within the branch. If the principal or senior executive officer in charge happens to be actively interested in organisational details and can make a little time to look over the machine now and then and see that the changes are made in the spirit as well as the letter, all may be well. But, as we have seen, not all the officers at this level are temperamentally, or, one might say, philosophically, inclined to search out work of this kind. If they are executives they may be men and women who have waited for work to come to them—and found that quite a lot did—throughout their service careers; and if they are administrators they may well have been trained to believe that such mundane tasks are not for them. In practice, therefore, the recommendations of Organisation and Methods

reports made *ab extra* are frequently left to founder among quite junior people, who may not always be fully acquainted with their intention or may regard any alteration of practice as something of a nuisance.

Where there is an Organisation and Methods Branch within the office, the position is somewhat different. The adviser, as an officer of the Department, has perhaps less initial suspicion to overcome, but on the other hand he does not possess the subtle advantages that sometimes accrue to 'a man from the Treasury'. Much will depend on the relations between the Establishment Officer and the people responsible for Organisation and Methods. If he is known to be interested, and to support them when conflicts of opinion or interest arise, they may be strongly placed. Whether they can see the problem with the same objectivity as a man from outside is another matter. They will be more familiar than he with the trees in this particular wood, and this may sometimes stand them in good stead. They will also be in a better position to follow up an assignment and secure some approach to continuity of treatment. But they will not always, unless they possess a capacity for this sort of thing quite unusual among medium grade civil servants—and indeed among administrators generally—be likely to see the Department as outsiders see it or to do full justice to the interests of the public.

The net result of all this is not catastrophic, and it does not by any means amount to a suggestion that Organisation and Methods is not making an effective contribution to the increase of efficiency within the service. It merely means that at present the extent of its influence is limited and the results achieved patchy and somewhat spasmodic. Where a review is carried out, the Department or branch concerned is generally a great deal better for it. But the knife does not always probe deep enough, and there are always areas of the service crying out for attention. There are also sectors, as we have seen, where it is difficult, if not impossible, to use this tool properly without trenching on what is generally regarded as policy and where the active and continuous participation of the junior administrators and senior

executives within the branches is needed unless much of the time and money spent on Organisation and Methods assignments is to be wasted.

There is no very obvious panacea for these ills. Something might be done by strengthening and slightly increasing in rank and authority some of the teams engaged on Organisation and Methods both in the Treasury and within Departments, with a view to making it easier for them to look all round the problems they are asked to solve, to cut knots which might otherwise have to be untied and to solve certain problems by abolishing them. But for a fully satisfactory solution it would doubtless be necessary to await the results of the further managerial training of the junior and middle ranks of the service which will be advocated later in this book and which, in one way or another, must be accomplished if the service is to keep pace with outside events. If the average higher executive or senior executive officer were to carry in his knapsack a fairly detailed knowledge of the various weapons which have been and are being developed for combating waste, delay, indifference and inefficiency, and if the average principal and assistant secretary were to regard it as part of his job to bring a general understanding of such things to the work of running his branch, the process of raising the worst sectors of the service to the level of the best would be hastened and simplified.

This is not really very much to ask—nor is there much reason to doubt that something of the kind will be done sooner or later. Indeed, in various places, throughout the service, Heads of Departments, Establishment Officers and individual assistant secretaries and principals are already encouraging their immediate subordinates to take an active interest in management problems of this kind. There are, of course, difficulties—real and imaginary. There is the 'Can't you see I'm too busy?' type of man whose trouble may be that no one ever taught him to delegate, and there is the fellow whose perennial question: 'Yes, but will it work?' expects, one might almost say demands, a negative answer. And there is also the difficulty that many civil servants—

including some of the most senior and most capable of them—have been so bred on detail as to have a vested interest in it. A man who has lived his life, and made his way among the files and inkpots may not sufficiently suspect familiar paper solutions or realise how impossibly complex the web of words is that he is constantly weaving; and a man who knows more than any man living about some distressing clause of a dismal Act may not always be among the foremost of those who advocate that it should be removed from the statute book.

There is also among the middle and lower ranks of the service a not altogether unjustifiable addiction to the doctrine of 'plus ça change'. Administrators are, as we have seen, supposed to be versatile, and are seldom left in a branch more than a few years; and there is a growing tendency to move the more promising of the young senior or higher executive officers fairly rapidly from branch to branch, with the admirable idea of broadening their experience. This, coupled with the activities of those responsible for Organisation and Methods, means that many a steady old executive will have seen King Log follow King Stork with bewildering rapidity and will have observed, not perhaps without some satisfaction, that there is a tendency for hasty reforms to cancel each other out and leave the man of detailed experience in control.

Partly for this reason, and partly because old ways seem easier than new, there is not much spontaneous enthusiasm for Organisation and Methods among executive and clerical officers. They have become accustomed over the years to obey voices they know, and are inclined to characterise as 'half-baked' or 'irresponsible' (both favourite words of abuse in the service) innovations of a tentative or experimental nature. Some find it easier to count than estimate, and are unhappy about taking calculated risks in the interests of economy or long-term efficiency; many will look askance, for example, at a suggestion that to save his senior's time—and increase his own self respect—an executive officer might, in certain circumstances, have only a sample of his work checked by a supervisor. And in general

their initial response to innovations which require them to exercise judgment is not always encouraging.

This is not to say that the clerical and executive classes do not contain many men and women who are wide awake or capable of being awakened and encouraged to contribute to the efficiency of the service in this way. It is merely to suggest that there has been some neglect of the available human material, and that it is now particularly important not to make false starts. Before a junior civil servant commits himself fully to a new approach, possibly at some initial inconvenience and possibly also against the tide, as it is flowing in his particular section, he naturally wants to feel that the men who are guiding him have full authority, that they will back him up if the new methods run into difficulties, and that they in turn, and their methods, will not be swept away and repudiated in the course of some further change.

There are obvious difficulties about securing this, as things stand, partly because of the wide discrepancies of mood and practice between Departments, and partly because new ways and means of promoting efficiency are constantly being propounded and old ones rejected. Fundamentally, Organisation and Methods is as much an art as a science, and a difficult art at that. But something is already done by the Treasury to promote interest and also some degree of uniformity of approach to questions of this kind, and doubtless more will be done in future. This is a field where, as in the case of Treasury financial control, pressure from the centre must be constantly supplemented by co-operation from within the Departments. And money and time might be worse spent than in taking steps to see that a fair proportion of the service's middle rankers have more than a nodding acquaintance with Organisation and Methods and with the techniques of office management generally.

We have here a few thousand people in charge of many thousands of junior officers on whom very large sums of public money are spent annually. The few thousand supervisors have, for the most part, the mental capacity to reorganise and redeploy their juniors more economically and

more intelligently. What many lack at present is training, encouragement and the conviction that management is a primary part of their job and is one to which they should actively apply themselves. Many a decent old higher executive officer who has a score or so of people under him today could find ways and means, if he applied himself actively to it, of dispensing with two or three of them. And many a young clerk is wasted or under-employed because his supervisor has never seriously asked if his talents are being used to their full extent. Furthermore, in pockets throughout the service, enthusiasms are being blunted and individuals being worn down because there is no one to enquire (or to encourage them to enquire themselves) how their particular task could be done better, more neatly, less laboriously or with more obvious relation to its real purpose.

This is, of course, more than a matter of short-term efficiency, seen as a ratio of things done for money spent. It is a question of the intelligent and ultimately efficient employment and development of human beings, who may later have important responsibilities to bear, outside as well as inside the service. Of course the public service is not alone in having this problem, but it shares with other large undertakings a certain immunity from the pressure of competition which makes it particularly desirable that methods of self-criticism should be developed from within, that they should be widespread and that the lessons learned from them should be fully applied. Organisation and Methods as it has developed in the service, is only one of the tools that may be useful in this connexion, but it is an important one, and one that could profitably be used more widely than at present and in such a way as to carry it closer to the day-to-day work of the branches. The key to any such extended use of these techniques lies in the attitude and approach of middle-grade civil servants. In this, as in other things, a full understanding on their part of what is intended and a complete willingness to co-operate and to get their juniors to do the same are prerequisites of progress. Indeed, it might well be argued that money spent systematically in training the younger generation of supervisors and

encouraging them to regard themselves as members of the profession of management would more than pay for itself in the course of a few years by the reduction in numbers it would make possible. Perhaps the most popular civil servant of all, from the point of view of the public, is one they have just stopped paying for!

CHAPTER V

The Total Personality

We are now in a position to piece together what we have learned about the recruitment, training, deployment and conditioning of civil servants and to form a complete picture. We know where many of these men and women come from, what they do, how much they are paid. It is time to ask what sort of people they are: what are their strengths and weaknesses; what is their philosophy likely to be; what are their convictions and what are their prejudices?

It will have been gathered that the service is strongly hierarchical, and it will be seen from the figures in the Appendices that, structurally, it resembles a pyramid, with a huge base, substantial middle section and a tiny apex. This last comprises the administrative officers and also the professional and specialist officers, whom we have excluded from consideration since they contribute less than the three main classes to the service's relations with the public. The executive class makes up the middle section and a multitude of clerical and sub-clerical officers forms the base. We are concerned in this chapter with people, not officials, and it would be unwise to place much reliance on these broad functional divisions. But they make a useful starting-point and a framework within which we can assemble our conclusions.

Let us begin at the bottom, with the clerks, typists, punched-card operators and Post Office sorters, who, with many other similar people, comprise the base of our pyramid. We have met many of them before, of course, outside this book—or caught glimpses of them—in works of fiction,

in the newspapers, at the cinema. These are the rank and file, from whose numbers come the tea-drinking typists who giggle their way through British films; the little men with sandwich lunches, who turn out to have murdered their wives in the short stories in evening papers; the people in the food offices who gave ridiculous answers to gentlemen who used to write to *The Times* about it; the chaps with cobwebs on their desks and tea at their elbows, much beloved of the cartoonists; the traditionally talkative young ladies in the Post Office.

We have met them in real life too. They deal with us if we enter the local office of the Ministry of Labour or the Ministry of Pensions. They listen to our complaints about telephone service. They send us forms reminding us that our wireless licence must be renewed. They, or people rather like them, send us our income tax forms, and issue our passports and birth certificates. And if we happen to ring up a Government office or call in at one without an appointment it is they who take the first shock of our enquiries. There are so many of them, in proportion to the executives and administrators higher up the pyramid, and they turn up in so many odd and unexpected places, that it is from them, directly or indirectly, that all but the most cautious or expert of us derive our first impressions of the civil service. We shall see that they do not make the policies, frame the regulations or write the instructions. But it is they, almost invariably, who carry them out in detail and it is they who generally make the first impact upon the public.

We must be careful in trying to generalise about them, because, as we have seen, they enter the service by so many different doors, at so many ages, and because the work they do varies enormously. Within the all-embracing term 'Clerical Officer', for instance, we may find a girl of sixteen or seventeen who has just left her secondary school and is learning to look after files in a registry, or a middle-aged man with three children who came in as a temporary clerk when the army released him after the war and is doing work not unlike that of a solicitor's clerk. We will also find, scattered through the clerical ranks in most government

offices, people who came in as typists and have been promoted, and others who have risen from one of the sub-clerical grades of the Post Office.

Educationally, as we have seen, almost all the people at the base of the pyramid have one thing in common: they have not attended a university. Of the older ones, almost all began and ended their formal education at elementary schools. Much of their real schooling has been gained in the civil service and in the armed forces in the First or Second World War. Of the younger ones, many stayed at school longer, and almost all the young people who entered after 1945 have been to a secondary modern or grammar school. Changes in educational terminology and the fall in the content of education during the Second World War make it difficult to make useful comparisons; but it is fairly clear that, in the clerical grades at least, the last comers have been best served so far as formal education is concerned. The gap between the general level of conversation and range of interests of the young people who entered the lower ranks of the service shortly before the war and the older people they found there was often striking. The disparity was increased in those days by the fact that, as we have seen, many of the clerical and sub-clerical people then in the service had been recruited by various exceptional methods shortly after the First World War and that in the lean years between the wars very few young people had joined the service. At present, the difference between the current intake and those already there in the service is not quite so marked. The girl we have just mentioned, coming straight from school, will find numbers of her own contemporaries in the service, and there is less chance than there would have been in 1937, say, that she will work initially among much older people with a restricted and deadening outlook. The older people will still be there, of course, and the impact they make on the new-comer will derive some of its strength from the dingy and unprepossessing atmosphere in which most clerical officers are expected to work, from the dusty electric lights descending on looped cords from rusty hooks, from the unhandsome furniture and the general air of unhappy

improvisation. But it will not be overwhelming: the young new-comer will not be quite alone.

Nevertheless, the atmosphere in the lower ranges of the civil service remains doggedly unintellectual. There is a descent from the atmosphere of school, a kind of heavy indifference and a confirmed scepticism, which the young entrant from a secondary school—particularly if it is a secondary grammar school—will probably never have experienced before. It is not quite as destructive of the bright optimism of youth as an army barrack-room shall we say. And things are better than they were. The new-comer is no longer sent out to fetch the men's beer. But he may well find that one of the most important tasks of his first years is making the tea. Something of the old atmosphere, when the head of section was a god-like being in a top hat still lingers in the corridors of certain Government Departments.

The accommodation has much to do with this. It would be difficult, for instance (to take an example from outside the service), for the breeziest of American expeditors to achieve an air of bright efficiency in the rabbit warren of grubby offices in and about King's Cross station where British Railways have to house some of their staff; and, as we have seen, the Ministry of Works, cramming civil servants into requisitioned houses, war-time huts and Whitehall buildings that have seen better days, has to face similar difficulties on a much larger scale. It has been lightheartedly suggested elsewhere that, like Eton, the civil service might be a better place if one could sack half the chaps. This is, perhaps, an exaggeration; but it would certainly be more efficient if one could dispose of the less desirable half of the accommodation.

It is the lower orders, the clericals and sub-clericals, who are most affected by these physical difficulties, and who tend most to take on the colour of their surroundings. 'The world is abandoned', as V. S. Pritchett has said, in a different context, 'and the gates close upon the recruit, as private possessions of the body and the mind are systematically destroyed, the will is thrown away, the subject is in a condition as abject as that of Saint Ignatius when he stood

in rags at Montserrat; only after abasement can obedience become an instinct and the old man give place to the new man, the required automaton, fulfilled in corporate pride and corporate wholeness. That is the ultimate reward; in the interim, he sinks restfully and unresponsibly into the dull, kind, corrupt world of the closed community. . . .'

The people thus received are the foot soldiers of the service—if not expendable then absent, very often, from the minds of those who are making policy. No one tells a Minister that he cannot introduce this or that service because there is nowhere in the office to put the clerks who will be needed to run it. The Minister would be somewhat impatient if anyone did. So from time to time a few more clerical officers are smuggled into a basement, another old house in Kensington is scrounged by the Ministry of Works or a new huddle of army huts is called into being at the 'periphery'. All this squeezing of quarts into pint pots produces an atmosphere of mysterious moves and makeshift arrangements that leaves its mark on junior civil servants, as they sit month by month, year by year, in rooms not meant to be offices—in Victorian hotels, perhaps, or gutted Georgian drawing rooms—and gather their screens and racks about them, to keep out draughts and to fashion for themselves a little solitude within the official deserts of their lives.

Not very much is expected of them. And, after a time, some of them cease to be capable of very much—a cycle of events not peculiar to the civil service. In all large establishments—and in terms of staff the civil service is a very large one—there is this tendency for the pace to be slowed to that of the slowest member and for the energies of youth to be blunted. And the age structure, as we have seen, makes matters particularly difficult at present. An elderly supervisor may judge a young man or woman in terms of what a junior of an earlier day would have been capable of, and may well waste the greater part of the young man's talents and abilities. He will remember the long years he himself spent, and became content to spend, performing unworthy tasks, and may well proceed from the assumption

that the new junior ought to be content to do the same. Even if the supervisor is able to put himself in the younger person's place, he may well find that within the system there is nothing very interesting or inspiring that he can find his junior to do. The service has accumulated over the years large blocks of clerical and sub-clerical work that Baron von Munchausen himself could scarcely have described as attractive, and the qualities needed to get it done are very often those of the tortoise—not the hare.

We have looked at these people, so far, as officials. It remains to enquire whether they lead more vivid lives outside the office and whether it can fairly be said of the average junior civil servant that, 'When he sits in place, he is another man'. Surprisingly often, one gets the impression that he is. Many a submissive creature, sitting obediently at her desk from day to day, will be found, on closer investigation, to be nursing some hidden talent. Unremarkable members of the minor and manipulative grades will turn out to be local councillors or Justices of the Peace. The evening schools and literary institutes of London attract very large numbers of civil service typists and clerical officers, pursuing at advanced levels subjects that would surprise, and perhaps scandalise, their superiors. And the occasional exhibitions of handicrafts and the plays put on by various Government offices suggest that the lower orders of the service display much greater originality and enterprise outside the office than they are allowed to show at their daily work. The more personal experience one has of individual officers the more this general impression is reinforced. One is led to the conclusion that in its vast lower depths the service wastes an unconscionable amount of talent.

It is notoriously difficult to check impressions of this kind. There are no statistics that can be called in aid. But the story of the indifferent clerk who is found to be a person of some importance in his private world outside the office is repeated so often and in so many different forms, that few people who know the lower grades of the service intimately or who have worked in them can doubt that in many cases the official duties scarcely scratch the surface of the available

talent. There are people who are already at full stretch and who would be lost if someone asked them to go a little faster or do something a little harder than at present. And there are individuals whose capabilities are such as could never be guided into official channels. But, in the main, the picture is one of people not fully extended by their official duties—and certainly not inspired by them. And yet they are, in general, people who were not, at least in their younger years, incapable of considerable thought and effort; and it is remarkable what a word or two of encouragement and explanation, and a feeling, where it can be implanted, that they are doing a job that matters, will achieve, even among those who have been longest exposed to the atmosphere of the service. They are people eminently in need of good and consistent leadership.

Before leaving the clericals and others at the base of the pyramid, we should perhaps say a word about their political and pseudo-political activities, inside and outside the service. In the Whitley Councils and other committees which, as we have seen, enable the staff to make some contribution to civil service management, the clerical grades seldom have any difficulty in making their voices heard. This is partly because there are very many of them, but partly, too, because they display a certain directness and militancy that is not always present in their superiors. In the higher grades there are usually several people present at any meeting who are only too capable of seeing two sides to every question. The junior grades have in general less time for sophistical arguments. They usually know what they want, or some of them do, and they set out to get it. Their trade unions are, as trade unions go, very well run, and the impression one gets from their annual conferences is certainly not one of sleepy inefficiency or indifference to current affairs. Of course the civil service unions catering for the clerical and similar classes are, like most political and quasi-political organisations, disproportionately influenced by a small minority of militants and the public pronouncements of an association sometimes reflect the views of the more extreme members, but one gets the impression that the rank and file

of their membership, if sometimes to the right of leadership, both politically and temperamentally, are more interested and more closely in touch with events likely to affect their salaries and conditions of service than the rank and file of the average trade union. The extent to which civil servants may indulge in outside politics is of course limited. One's first impression, however, is that most junior civil servants might be expected in ordinary times to vote 'left'. There are certain factors—their relatively low pay, their security from dismissal, the fact that they need not placate or conciliate or associate their well-being with that of any specific employer—that make them feel less affinity with the lower middle classes, and more with the working classes, than is generally felt by office workers. Closer examination confirms this general impression, but also discloses a very large number of clericals who would prefer to regard themselves as members of the middle classes, who carry the *Daily Telegraph* or possibly the *Daily Mail* and who dress with the care and sobriety which were much more common in the service before the war than now. These people are probably in a minority. But the minority is a large one.

We turn now to the middle grades of the service, which are little known outside it. Most people could draw a fair caricature of the junior civil servants we have just been considering, or of the small and hitherto select group of higher officials we shall be dealing with later in this chapter. But few people who do not have close and frequent dealings with them know much about the executives, the non-commissioned officers of the service—or are even aware of their existence as a separate class. We have seen already that the word 'executive' is used here in a peculiar sense. These people are not executives in the commercial or American sense of the word or in the sense used in the armed forces, where one speaks of an executive as distinct from a specialist or professional officer. They are merely the middle section of the civil service pyramid, touching policy at one end and sometimes involved in quite menial tasks at the other. They are the descendants of the old second division clerks and have been described variously as the 'head' and

the 'backbone' of the service. Some of them, as we have seen, draw higher salaries and control more staff than do the junior members of the administrative and professional grades. Others, junior executive officers who have just entered the service, may well sit among clerical officers, being trained by them, and, for a number of years, doing jobs that are clerical or quasi-clerical in nature.

It may be as well to begin by reminding ourselves precisely how the executive grade is divided and what the various parts of it are supposed to do. At the bottom end are the junior executive officers, who may be young men and women straight from the sixth form of a grammar school who have entered the service by way of a fairly stiff academic examination and have not yet taken on much of the colouring of the service. They may equally be older people, promoted, possibly during the war, from the clerical grades. Some of these will have spent ten or fifteen important years in the civil service between the wars, when promotion was hard to come by and the competition for advancement so keen that a single error or awkward brush with a senior officer might influence a man's whole career. Some of them might never have been promoted but for the war, and in general their attitude is one of cautious watchfulness. In steadiness and attention to detail they may have much to teach their younger colleagues, but they are seldom notable for their grasp or self-confidence. The iron of the service has entered their souls, and it was from their ranks, almost certainly, that the retired civil servant was drawn, who, asked by a farmer friend to help sort apples, was heard to say: 'I'll do anything—dig, plough, hoe, weed—but please don't ask me to take a decision'!

Higher executive officers are, or ought to be, made of sterner stuff. They are generally in charge of small sub-sections containing executive and clerical officers. They work under the eye of principals or senior executive officers, and should be capable of taking responsibility for the routine or semi-routine work that comes their way. They are important people—part of the hinge on which the whole business of getting things done in a Government Department

frequently turns. If they are slow or inefficient the conduct of public business may be becalmed and 'lose the name of action'. If they know their job, and do it, their superiors will have time to give the necessary thought to general questions of management and policy. In some cases, they are not at present quite up to their job. This is largely a legacy, as we have seen, of the war and pre-war years, when junior civil servants were, by the force of circumstances, kept for very many years in positions where they had no opportunity to take decisions or to develop a firm grasp of the implications of the work they were asked to do, and then, all at once, thrust into posts of considerable responsibility. One cannot suddenly teach a cart-horse to run races.

But this is one of the points in the service hierarchy at which the prospects for the future are not by any means discouraging. The younger higher executive officers, promoted since the war, belongs for the most part to the best crop of middle grade officers the service has had for a very long time. Many of them joined as junior executives, or sometimes as clerical officers, shortly before the war, at a time when the general economic climate and the lack of facilities for higher education sent into the lower ranks of the service many people who would now go to universities. And large numbers were able to broaden their experience during the war, either as officers or n.c.o.'s, in the armed forces. They are, intellectually, quite capable of dealing with such problems as the service sends them at present and more. And if they are used properly they will be able to contribute a great deal in future. They are, for the most part, men and women in their early thirties, who have some experience of the ways of the service but are not yet set into its peculiar mould. The great danger is that, in the years that will still pass before their seniors make way for them, they will, by dint of too long waiting in subordinate positions, lose some of the force and energy—and the enlightenment and sympathy—which, as a group, they possess to an extent not found elsewhere in the middle and lower ranks of the service.

Taking one step further up the side of the pyramid, we find that a few of the younger men and women we have

just been discussing have already broken through to the level of senior executive officer. But we have seen, when discussing these matters statistically, that the great majority of the senior executive posts are still occupied by people of an older vintage, men and women in their late fifties, who have spent upwards of thirty years in the service. These senior executive officers and the work they do deserve the closest scrutinity. Just as a regimental sergeant major may contain within himself and pass on to others the prevailing tone of a regiment, these officers carry on and interpret the traditions of the civil service. They are the gear box—an unkind critic might sometimes call them the brake—of the Government machine. They, more than any other group, dictate the pace. In some extreme cases they decide whether the machine will move at all. These officers, unlike the higher executive officers we have just been considering, are important in the main for what they say and what they are, rather than for what they do. It is their influence that is pervasive. Principals and assistant secretaries will often consult them, drawing on their experience of the service (which is, of course, immense) and will seldom ignore their advice. Their relations with the administrators are usually quite close. Some of them work directly to principals in charge of branches, some of them, as we have seen, have branches of their own. Many principals are themselves former senior executive officers. Above the senior executives, but still in the executive class, there are chief executive officers and others—different only in degree. These are merely senior executive officers on stilts, chosen by good fortune or because of their peculiar sharpness or perseverance to do the highest duties which the service allocates to members of the executive grade. These duties are, as we have seen earlier, often, but not always, concerned with figures or finance or the deployment of large blocks of staff on mainly routine duties—tasks of great complexity but not usually of great importance in principle.

Where they have writing to do, whether by way of minutes or letters to the public, their prose is in general staid and unassuming, but, at its best, hard and clear and revealing

that first-hand acquaintance with the subject matter which comes only with years of experience. It is by no means rare for an administrator, faced with a good executive draft which seems to him, on the face of it, to smack a little of officialese, to find it quite impossible to say the same thing adequately in as few words in any other way. He will not always forbear from altering it, all the same. But that is another story!

We have spent some time seeing precisely what these executives do because many of them have spent the greater part of their life doing it and it has, in that time, made great inroads upon their personality. This is a case where the man tends to be absorbed by the job. They are great talkers of shop, the executives, and if one casts an eye round a civil service canteen one will see group upon group of them discussing their work or their prospects. This is true in particular of the older executives; and in considering the class generally we must remember that it is divided, from the lowest to the highest executive grade, into those of the older and those of the younger age groups. Like speaks to like, and a smart young senior executive officer will generally be found lunching and hob-nobbing with higher executive and even executive officers of the same vintage, while the older officers will also be found banding together—and, generally, taking each other's part whenever threatened with some startling and potentially troublesome innovation, from whatever quarter.

Certain attitudes, however, run right through the executive hierarchy. They are for solidity and against brilliance. They distrust emotion and enthusiasm. They tend to be hard, cautious men and women—of a type generally supposed to be more common in Yorkshire than in the south. This professional scepticism and lack of fire is particularly pronounced in the older executives, but many of the younger and more junior members of the grade have imbibed a great deal of it. Anyone who has seen a group of young executives, supposedly the pick of the class, testing their wits against each other at Stoke D'Abernon or mingling with young graduates on training courses will confirm that in general they are harder, safer, more solid and less subtle

or imaginative men than their contemporaries who have entered from a university. These heavy and careful traits do not make the executives, on the whole, the gayest of people. They tend to have the qualities one finds useful but chilling in an actuary or accountant—and terrifying in one's income tax inspector. Saint Thomas, one imagines, is their patron saint.

This generalisation is, as most generalisations are, unfair to a minority; many executives, as we shall see when we come to consider their relations with the public, have spent a weary lifetime acting as official nursemaids to unfortunate and sometimes grossly inefficient people; and some of them have—to their great credit—emerged from this process with a watchful and essentially practical, but not unkindly attitude to the public. Men and women who have reached this position the hard way—and there are many of them in the executive ranks—are of great value to the service. They know the difficulties and dangers that sometimes make it inexpedient to pursue policies which seem, on the face of it, desirable or convenient. They can, if they are used intelligently, find ways of circumventing these obstacles. They can help their superiors to count the cost before putting new schemes into effect. They can give added strength to well-conceived plans—and sometimes contrive to make bad ones work. With their help everything is possible. Without their active co-operation the best-laid schemes of the administrators will do no more than limp painfully along.

Outside office hours, the executives, though substantial and generally respected citizens, are inclined to hold themselves rather more aloof from political discussion and from social activities of a markedly intellectual character than the more junior grades we discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Among the older executives, who fit snugly into the middle-most middle classes, gardening and golf are popular pastimes. Those who have got on are often inclined, being self-made men, to be ambitious for their children; and in many of their homes one senses a situation similar to that found among immigrants to the United States, whose children are often ungraciously aware of the cultural

limitations of their parents. Steadiness and respectability are words that spring to the lips when one thinks of them; and sometimes it is only when one meets a wife, married in youth and 'left behind' by the husband, that one appreciates how far he has come in an official lifetime.

The women executives, of whom, as we have seen, there are very many, deserve a special mention. Some of the older ones in the higher positions are, in a humble way, pioneers in the movement for opening the professions to women. Many of them have worked their way right up through the service, beginning as typists or clerical assistants; and (taking a full part in service politics and seizing the opportunities provided by the war) have reached positions of more influence and importance than those usually occupied by women in comparable employment outside the service. Although they have not hitherto enjoyed equal pay, many of them are comparatively affluent, and their standard of life frequently compares well with that of such of their male colleagues as are married men with children. Partly for this reason, one suspects, some of them have developed quite early traits of fastidiousness and independence, which one more often finds in older women and which give the impression that they are not particularly interested in marriage. These women, though not always as well educated originally as many of their male colleagues, are often able, by travel and by concert and theatre going, to acquire tastes and interests which are more varied and stimulating than those of their masculine counterparts. Strangely enough, this seems to have little influence on their approach to their work. The good female senior executive or higher executive officer is an executive first and a woman—possibly a woman of some culture—afterwards. She has all the strength and doggedness which we have seen to be typical of the executives, and her touch is not noticeably lighter than that of her male colleagues. It seems to be, once again, a case of the individual's outside interests being too weak to withstand the heavy and prolonged influence of the service.

We turn, finally, to more familiar subjects—the administrators and the professional men at the apex of the pyramid.

Much has happened in this sphere since H. E. Dale summarised the pre-war position in his excellent book, *The Higher Civil Service of Great Britain*, published in 1941. The top of the service is bigger than it was, and, for good or ill, the irruption of the barbarians which Dale hoped might be held back has occurred. Not only were large numbers of senior executives promoted into the administrative ranks during the war, but the true heirs of the old First Division—men brought in from the universities in their early twenties—have now to face the pressure of specialists and men who have come from the forces and elsewhere by way of the post-war reconstruction examinations. The Stoke D'Abernon experiment and the over-lapping of the executive and administrative classes which we have already discussed have further confused the issue, and we are further than ever from the small, bright band of administrators of uniformly excellent academic background and attainment which, one suspects, Dale hoped might one day lead the service out of the wilderness. Furthermore, the economic and, to some extent, the social background and status of senior civil servants have shifted downwards since before the war. The fall in the value of salaries, and the whittling away of various privileges formerly enjoyed by the middle classes have borne particularly heavily on civil servants, particularly those who had not married and set up home, and acquired such useful capital assets as cars and houses before the war.

Starting at the bottom of the administrative ladder, we find 200 or 300 assistant principals, of ages ranging from the early twenties to the early thirties. The younger are people from the top half of the honours list who have passed the open examination for the administrative class, with or without benefit of Stoke D'Abernon, and will have to spend some years still under training. Most of these will have about them still something of the atmosphere of their university. They will argue from first principles with a fluency and at a length that frequently infuriates their executive, and even their staider and somewhat more case-hardened administrative colleagues. They are the midshipmen of the service, and if they are given work to do it is, in most offices, though not in

all, work which someone senior will probably do again. They are inveterate starters of hares, incautious openers of serious doors and, in a phrase often on the lips of the senior executives, 'they are only too likely to go off at a tangent'.

The older assistant principals are, in general, a more sober group, sensing the proximity of promotion to principal —a step that may well double a man's income overnight— and, not unnaturally, trimming their sails accordingly. If married, they are likely to be poor—as badly off, considering the appearances they must keep up and the tastes they have usually developed—as anyone in the service, and much worse off, for instance, than the female higher executive officers to whom, in a year or two, they will be giving orders. If they have come across, through Stoke D'Abernon, from the executive ranks, as some of the oldest of them have, they will probably be measuring their chances of promotion and their position *vis-à-vis* the senior executives very narrowly indeed, and perhaps wondering, on occasion, whether they caught the right bus after all. In general two topics of conversation perhaps predominate among assistant principals: if they are older, their prospects; if they are younger, their universities.

It is only fair to add that the little band of assistant principals is probably more closely in touch than almost any other group with affairs outside the service. They are young enough to be interested in generalities and not yet too deep among the departmental trees to see the administrative wood. They often have fresh contacts with the academic world, and they are apt to travel more adventurously among ideas— as well as among people—than their busier seniors. They may well take administration, and the public service generally, more seriously than they find it possible to take their own departments—a good fault in a service whose loyalties are so often the other way about. If their work is in the private office of one of the larger Departments, as it often is, or if they are secretaries of departmental committees, they may well move among people of a rank and substance that they will not often meet again in the long period as a principal in charge of a branch that probably lies

ahead of them. Their years as assistant principals are formative, and many an elderly assistant secretary has, as his immediate colleagues sometimes find to their cost, a stray touch of the untamed assistant principal about him.

It is an axiom that when a man becomes a principal he puts away childish things, if for no other reason because so many weighty and apparently more important problems descend upon him. The civil service has never quite got over the war and the new and untidy jobs that have been thrust upon it since 1939. The straight lines of command, the clear distinctions, the general aspiration towards pure administration, the predictability of one's official colleagues, that were alleged to be present in some measure before the war, have not yet returned. No one who looks carefully and honestly at the world outside the service is likely to believe they ever will. The modern principal is not asked, except in a few exceptional cases, to spin ideas *in vacuo*. Nor is he often required to advise Ministers. He is likely to find himself perched on top of a clumsy and uncertain piece of human machinery which no one fully understands or, possibly, wandering, oil can in hand, among a number of even larger machines, each one of which seems at every moment on the point of breaking down. He may, if he is of a conservative frame of mind, wistfully look back to the time when it was deemed sufficient to deal with general problems as they came to one, neatly minuted on files; and if he is a survivor of the old days, freewheeling out of the service, he may spend his last official years behaving as if the old order had never changed.

But in general, the principal cannot nowadays, as we have seen earlier, allow himself the luxury of such aloofness. The machinery of Government has become so complex, problems of co-ordination so serious, that he must be forever sorting out tangles, restoring some semblance of order, dealing with *ad hoc* problems which are properly executive not administrative. He must be a jack of all trades, a man who, if he cannot 'make friends and influence people' can at least develop alternative methods of getting things done. This is work which does not foster the more serene and

orderly qualities which young men bring into the service from the universities. The younger principals, who have never known the pre-war order of things, tend to be empiricists, capable, if called upon to do so, of writing long and careful minutes and memoranda, but on the whole, more at home with the cut and thrust of short minutes, quick semi-official letters and answers to Parliamentary Questions. They make their contribution, of course, to policy in the larger sense, but it is seldom a decisive one. Essentially they are improvisers—finding their own way about the service, and not in any sense the heirs of a coherent tradition. They are, for the most part, still in the process of coming to terms with life—of testing the lessons learned in the forces or at college against the realities of public administration. There is a great gap—not only in years—between these young men, most of whom have seen service in the Second World War, and the older principals who are, in many cases, veterans of the First.

This air of uncertainty and improvisation carries over into the private lives of the younger principals. Housing is a chronic problem for most of them. Not many have private incomes; few had settled down to domesticity before the war; few, consequently, are able to live in the houses or flats they would like, in the districts that take their fancy. Many of them are accordingly forced out into the suburbs among people who do not always give them the mental stimulus they have enjoyed in their earlier years. Many are devoting such a high proportion of their incomes to paying for accommodation, that they are not easily able to keep up with other professional groups: lawyers, doctors and others, with whom their predecessors would have mixed socially. One of the results is that many members of this group, particularly those with children to educate, lead rather narrower lives and mix less freely than their pre-war predecessors. Many of their friends are other civil servants, or perhaps rather wilder and less substantial people they have met and become acquainted with at college or in the forces. To describe these changes is not to assess their effect. Obviously the officers concerned are not pleased with them,

and in some ways they must have an unfortunate influence on their work. It cannot be pleasant to deal from day to day with business men whose standard of life is clearly much higher than one's own or to work among medical administrators whose salaries have kept pace, more or less, with the earnings of medical practitioners. But it may well be that the public interest has been well served in the long run by the fact that some of its administrative élite have found themselves face to face, at least for a period, with a number of unpleasantly earthy and practical problems and have been forced to cast their net for friends in waters where some of their predecessors would have hesitated to fish. Much depends on the future level of administrative salaries in the service. If, as a result of the work of the 1953 Royal Commission or otherwise, they are brought into line with salaries generally, little permanent harm and some good may have been done. But if, as they work through their administrative lives, the officers concerned continue to be the rather shabby poor relations of the professional world, their characters and the work they do will in some cases clearly be unhappily affected by their loss of social status.

We have seen in the younger principals a group of restlessly intelligent men, still in the process of finding their place in the administrative hierarchy. Among their seniors the restlessness is less apparent, the place more assured. Many of these senior principals are former executives, now on their way out of the service, filling in a year or two before retirement. Of them there is little to say that has not been said about the older senior executive officers. Perhaps those who have moved over to the administrative ranks have acquired a certain additional polish, an enlarged air of authority, an increased urbanity. They mix on certain social occasions with the younger administrators, but the liaison is not close, and their ties are generally with the executives. One finds them lunching with their contemporaries, of lower rank but similar *Weltanschauung*, exchanging official gossip with them, seeking their opinions and not infrequently taking their advice. Such associations lead to a blurring of the distinctions between the two classes. Principals of this type

will tend to do business in an executive way, to have allies in unexpected places, to confuse and draw together functions that their more academically minded colleagues would wish to keep separate and sometimes to plunge into detail which the younger men feel should be dealt with at a much lower level. In these respects they do not, perhaps, set a very orderly example. But the best of them can be very helpful to their younger colleagues, and indirectly to the public, by teaching them how to come to terms with the executives and how to get things done and make their decisions stick in the conditions in which the service has to work. They have filled a gap, not always brilliantly but more than adequately, and the service will be a very different place when they go, as most of them will, in the course of the next five or ten years.

We have explained the gap between the older and younger principals in an earlier chapter, and shown that it is partly caused by the exceptionally rapid promotion from principal to assistant secretary during the years of expansion during and shortly after the war. A few but not many of the men who entered the service as assistant principals during the thirties are still principals, and their ranks are reinforced by a small number of principals of roughly the same age who were brought into the service, sometimes from commerce, sometimes from the forces, during or shortly after the war. But most of the university-trained administrators who are in their forties have reached the assistant secretary level, and it is to this point, one step further up the pyramid, that we must now follow them. We are now on the ground traversed by Dale in the book mentioned earlier. Assistant secretaries—there are still only about seven hundred of them in the whole service—are men very near the top of the pyramid, and they are usually, though not always, in direct touch with Ministers. Sometimes, in a quiet Department, an assistant secretary may not exchange words with a politician more than once or twice a year. But other assistant secretaries are, as we shall see, in almost daily touch with Ministers. It is the assistant secretary who usually has the first real shot at drafting the heads of a Bill, who is responsible, with the lawyers, for the content of regulations, who signs circulars, meets delegations,

chairs committees and working parties and, in general, puts the finishing touch to answers to Parliamentary Questions. The older assistant secretaries fall broadly into two groups: those usually from public or other fee paying schools and the older universities, who were already in post, either as principals or assistant secretaries, when Dale was surveying the position, and those who have come right up through the executive grades during and since the war. The younger assistant secretaries are, for the most part, men who came in as assistant principals before the war and managed to make their way out of the ruck, either by dint of being on the spot at the right time or by coming back and making a name for themselves directly after the war. The three groups are thrown closely together by the conditions of service life. They frequently confer with each other, formally and informally, and it is a pre-condition of the functioning of a department that its assistant secretaries should somehow manage to get on with each other. But they are of sharply contrasting types.

There is less new to say about the people at this level than there is about their juniors. The former executives are, it is true, temporarily in greater force than was the case before the war; but within the next decade most of them will have retired. They have, on the whole, brought their habits with them, acquiring a few pleasant airs and graces by the way, but remaining essentially sound, hard-working men who will never surprise anyone—and never consciously let anyone down.

The other two groups are separated more by differences of intellectual stature than by anything else. The older are, on the whole, the less brilliant of their generation—most of the high fliers have already gone further—the younger are the pick of theirs. It is they who, though their course upwards may be delayed for a few years, will eventually grasp such glittering prizes as the service has to offer—and enjoy them at a comparatively early age. Things have gone well for them, on the whole, inside and outside the service. They have been spared the long years of waiting, first as assistant principals, then as principals, which has been the lot of their seniors, and which may yet be the lot of

many of their juniors. They are fresher, less hag-ridden and perhaps less touched by life than men in their very senior position generally are, and in this lies their chief strength—other than their quite exceptional intellectual powers—and their chief weakness. Some of them are, in sharp contrast with most of the younger principals we have been discussing, generalisers and theoreticians; and it will be interesting to see how the two groups react on each other in the decades to come.

We have reached a point so near the summit of the service and so thoroughly worked over by Dale before the war and by Kelsall since, in his *Higher Civil Servants in Britain*, that it would be invidious to do more than make a few brief generalisations. And before we turn to these it will be as well to deal briefly with the professional groups who, as we have seen, work very closely with the administrative classes. These men and women tend over the years to become very much civil servants and to lose much of the distinctive colouring that they may have acquired during the comparatively long period of training. Although they generally enter the service later than administrators, they have usually settled down into the service routine by the time they reach their late thirties or early forties, and will be found approaching their work and dealing with it very much as an administrator of about the same rank would if the task came his way. This is particularly true of the lawyers; and, by the time a man becomes a legal adviser or assistant legal adviser, he will generally be able to sense how his administrative colleagues would approach a given administrative question and be in a position to frame his advice accordingly. Professional officers are, of course, at pains to keep up their contacts with their own profession, and they are sometimes able to derive help in this way in the business of keeping up their social status—help which is not available in quite the same way to the younger administrators. Perhaps the only other trait that we need notice here is that, before the war it was very often lack of capital and a need to earn quickly that drove a young doctor or lawyer into the service. It is true that the same factor pushed many young men who

were to become administrators in the same direction. But, with the professional man, the lack of capital was a much stronger and more common motive. So far as barristers are concerned, it probably still is.

It remains, then, to sum up and to say a few words about the topmost points of the service. In this last connexion there is little to be said that has not already been said, very ably, by Dale. His picture of the few score men at the top of the service still holds good, partly because some of those he described are still there, partly because they have replenished their ranks largely from the predictable sources. A few have come in from the universities. A few have gone out to commerce. In the main the gaps caused by death and retirement have been filled from people who were in 1939 already at or about assistant secretary level, in Dale's words: 'admirable specimens of the educated and capable middle class, intelligent without being noticeably responsive to new ideas, industrious, trustworthy, moderately ambitious, not enamoured of the Civil Service (or of any other profession) as such, but resolved to do their duty in it and truly desirous to cultivate their garden and to leave it better than they found it.'

To underline this statement one need only add that it is some fifteen years old, that in the interim its subjects have moved further away from the period when they were undergraduates and assistant principals and that the progress of events, in which they have played no small part, has given them all too little leisure or opportunity to replenish their stock of original ideas. The men who have reached the summit of the civil service are of necessity men of the very greatest ability, and they are, by definition, men who have shown themselves to be extremely well adapted to their environment. But many of them are by now tired men who have carried exceptionally heavy official burdens over the last fifteen or twenty years.

For an up-to-date picture of these few score tremendously important men, who deal constantly with Ministers and speak for the service as a whole and for their departments on various occasions, one need not look beyond the minutes

of evidence taken before the Royal Commission on the Civil Service. One finds them there, giving oral evidence blandly and imperturbably, parrying questions with practised adroitness and displaying all those qualities of smooth urbanity of which Dale alleged their predecessors to be possessed. The pace is hotter than it was, the pressures and complexities of Government greater, and some of these men at the top of the service are almost incredibly busy. But if they have changed in response to these pressures, and if their beliefs and standards have been affected by the events of the last decade, there is remarkably little sign of it on the surface. The heads of the service still appear to the outsider very much as Dale painted them.

As for the total personality of the civil servant, we have seen enough of the great range of human material within the service to appreciate that any brief generalisation is likely to be unfair. It has been suggested that stoical realism is a proper description of the official creed of the higher civil service. Dogged quietism might serve for that of the older executives, involuntary inertia for that of the clericals. For the new young men of the administrative and executive classes it is a little harder to find a label. Restless self-confidence would perhaps be a fair description of their state of mind. But one would be bound to add the rider that many of them have not, as yet, come fully to grips with life—or, for that matter, with the service.

CHAPTER VI

Civil Servants and Parliament

GOVERNMENT departments have been—disrespectfully—alleged to resemble a number of state elephants, proceeding more or less in line, in a direction generally predetermined by gentlemen in howdahs and at a pace not entirely uninfluenced by the proddings of their mahouts and the activities of a swarm of lesser attendants. The sight is an awe-inspiring one. But how is it managed—and how, in particular do such of the gentlemen in the howdahs as are Ministers and such of the attendants as are parliamentarians make their desires known to the patient and sagacious pachyderms in whose company they are travelling?

It must be said at once that in the last resort the Minister is in charge of the elephant. He answers to Parliament for the daily behaviour of his officials, and, if a Cabinet Minister, is responsible, with his colleagues, for the general line of advance. If his Department makes a bad mistake and this is discovered it is he who must correct it—or in some cases dismount and steal gracefully away. But this is not the whole story. The authority of a Minister is trenched in upon in various ways, and furthermore the scope of his Department's activities is so great that it is quite unrealistic to expect him to have a precise knowledge of every minute aspect of his Department's behaviour.

The formal limitations on a Minister's freedom of action are well known. So far as finance is concerned he must submit to the examination of the heads of his Department's estimates by the Treasury, on behalf of the Chancellor and Parliament, and by one or other of the sub-committees of the Estimates Committee, and also to the *ex post facto*

examination of the accounts by the Comptroller and Auditor-General and the Public Accounts Committee. And, in the unusual event of his wishing to over-rule his Permanent Secretary on an accounting point relating to the estimates, he must do so in writing, in the knowledge that the Treasury, the Comptroller and Auditor-General and the Public Accounts Committee will be fully apprised of the facts. So far as legislation is concerned, he must run the gauntlet of the Legislation Committee of the Cabinet and of the Cabinet itself. So far as the appointment of a Permanent Secretary to his Department is concerned, he must reconcile his own views with those of the Prime Minister, as advised by the Permanent Secretary to the Treasury.

The gentlemen in the howdahs are also subject to other limitations, of a political nature, which we need not pause to examine in detail here. They must, of course, have a feeling for what their own party, and for what Parliament and the press, may be expected to stand; and they must also contrive to reach down and assess the reactions of ordinary men and women in the constituencies, who have, in the last resort, the power to unseat them at the next election. Some of these functions they must perform alone, or with the help of their Parliamentary Secretaries and political advisers, in the role of party politicians who happen for the time being to be Ministers of the Crown. But others, arising directly out of the management of their departments or the technical problems facing them, may, despite their political implications, be dealt with in consultation with their non-political advisers.

This day-to-day consultation between Ministers, who are usually party politicians, and senior officials who are, by training and acquired—if not inherited—disposition, strictly non-party men, is one of the more interesting features of British public life. It would be idle to attempt to describe here a series of personal relationships which is constantly shifting and could only be adequately reported from inside. But it is perhaps permissible to make one or two general observations. The first is that there is clearly no set of precise rules governing the relations between a Minister and his most senior advisers. A Permanent or Deputy

Secretary may sometimes be seen to be hob-nobbing confidently in the howdah, at other times well out on the animal's neck. A Minister may place much or little reliance on the quasi-political judgments of his advisers. He may himself be predictable and easy-going, or wayward and inclined to play his own hand. He may be a consistent help to the Department in Parliament or an occasional dropper of bricks. Everything depends, clearly, on the strength of mind, personality, wisdom and experience of the men concerned.

The second general observation is that, although the Minister must obviously have the last word, a capable official who has reached Permanent Secretary or Deputy Secretary level has a number of natural advantages which ought to stand him in good stead if by any chance a Minister should attempt to brush his advice arbitrarily aside. Not only is he playing on his home ground, so to speak, and likely to find support among other senior members of the Department, but he will, if his cause is just, find useful allies in the Treasury, in the appropriate inter-departmental committees and, in the last resort, if the chasm is a broad one and the debate protracted, in the Cabinet itself. Furthermore, since he is not subject in quite the same degree as the Minister to the exigencies of the parliamentary time-table, and is not, in the same sense, a public figure, he generally has a little more time to cultivate the departmental garden, to assemble, if he is so inclined, compelling precedents and to cull the slow-blossoming flowers of official experience. The senior officials also have the advantage of superior numbers. They can, if they choose, practice the division of labour and the *lutte d'économie* in a fashion that not only eases their position *vis-à-vis* Ministers but makes it possible for them, as a race, to keep some oversight over the course of Government as a whole. Individually, they have perhaps less useful vantage points than the men whose undisputed, if temporary, place is in the howdah. But as a group they have, or may have if they wish, their fingers fairly closely on the pulse of events. The question remains: who is in charge of the elephant? How far is the Minister, restricted,

yet also sustained as we have seen, by the activities of various colleagues and advisers, really in control of the beast? The formal position of a Minister *vis-à-vis* his Department was recently re-stated in the House by the Home Secretary in connexion with the Crichel Down affair, as follows:

1. Where a civil servant carries out an explicit order by a Minister, the Minister must protect the civil servant concerned.

2. Where a civil servant acts properly in accordance with the policy laid down by the Minister, the Minister must equally protect and defend him.

3. Where a civil servant 'makes a mistake or causes some delay, but not on an important issue of policy and not where a claim to individual rights is seriously involved, the Minister acknowledges the mistake and he accepts responsibility, although he is not personally involved. He states he will take corrective action in the department.'

4. ' . . . where action has been taken by a civil servant of which the Minister disapproves and has no prior knowledge, and the conduct of the official is reprehensible, then there is no obligation on the Minister to endorse what he believes to be wrong, or to defend what are clearly shown to be errors of his officers. The Minister is not bound to approve of action of which he did not know, or of which he disapproves. But, of course, he remains constitutionally responsible to Parliament for the fact that something has gone wrong, and he alone can tell Parliament what has occurred and render an account of his stewardship.'

If we translate these principles into terms of current practice we find that the first category gives little difficulty. A direct order from a Minister is a rarity, and where one is given the position is quite clear. The difficulty arises when one tries to decide what proportion of the great mass of day-to-day decisions taken by civil servants falls into category 2 and what proportion falls potentially into categories 3 and 4. It was pointed out in the debate that a Minister can lay down rules and instructions for the conduct of business, and it is also true that an outstanding Minister can make his influence felt indirectly in remote corners of his Department.

It is therefore possible to argue that a great many of the day-to-day activities of middle grade civil servants fall within category 2. But it ought to be remembered that the *direct* influence exerted by a Minister is usually limited to his immediate entourage, that such rules as he lays down must usually be in general terms and that departmental policy, as it reaches the working level, via the assistant secretaries in charge of divisions, is a fairly broad stream, made up of many and various opinions of a number of people.

With the broad effect of any new legislation promoted by his Department the Minister will generally be completely *au fait*. In the course of its passage through Parliament he and his Parliamentary Secretary will come to know the Bill almost as intimately as will their senior administrative and legal advisers and, however long it remains on the statute book, it is improbable that anyone will ever know it quite as well again. But a Minister's acquaintance with enactments which he has inherited from his predecessors will generally be fragmentary. Few Ministers have the opportunity to shepherd through Parliament a piece of legislation which, like the Education Act of 1944, for instance, covers almost the whole scope of their Department's activities. And, even if they do, they do not always survive to reap where they have sown. Most legislation is a patchwork business, designed to make good deficiencies or enlarge upon powers contained in existing Acts; and in a number of offices—the Treasury, the Home Office and the Colonial Office, for example—many of the Department's activities are based, not on legislation, but on prerogative powers which have grown up over the decades and whose proper limits are largely a matter of feeling and instinct.

Whether a Department is a comparatively modern creature of statute or an ancient prerogative Department, it will usually have at disposal the power to make regulations or do certain things by way of Order in Council. Ministers must, of course, take responsibility for activities of this kind and, where necessary, answer for them in Parliament. If the statutory instrument concerned is brief, or deals with matters of great importance, the Minister will be as fully

informed and have as firm a grasp of its essentials when it is laid before Parliament as if it were major legislation. But if it is long and detailed, concerned possibly with a number of minor administrative matters, he will probably be content to be briefed only on the main points at issue. Statutory instruments of this kind have been made, over the last few years, at a rate of something like two thousand per annum, and it is clearly beyond the powers of a busy Minister to make himself master of all the detailed provisions of those that concern his Department. The extent to which these represent his own views must depend largely on his ability to communicate these to his administrative and legal advisers and to enforce them upon them. It is, in the last resort, a question of personalities. A forceful and experienced Minister will manage it; a less able man may not.

Just as much delegated legislation—some of it undisturbed by the years—underlies the Acts on the statute book, a mass of complex circulars and instructions underlies the regulations. These may sometimes bear the stamp of a Minister's personality, but he will scarcely ever be able to superintend their growth in detail. He may be asked to look at a particularly delicate paragraph in a circular, or to decide what precisely is to replace some old procedural instruction which has given considerable trouble. But, in general, these administrative documents will be drafted in the branches and have the finishing touches put to them by an under secretary or possibly by the Permanent or Deputy Secretary.

How often policy suffers a sea change between the point of its simple enunciation, perhaps in party-political terms, by a Minister and its appearance in some routine circular or departmental instruction is a moot point. Sometimes it is bound to: the hard facts of the situation will not permit so simple a solution as appeared possible at first sight; or considerations which were not in the forefront of the Minister's mind may make some modification desirable. Sometimes mere passage through many hands slightly alters the emphasis, until the resulting letter, signed perhaps by a lowly executive officer may, at first sight, bear no more relation to the Minister's pronouncement than a jumbled

phrase passed round the circle in a party game does to the words whispered in the ear of the first player. Things of this kind are inevitable in large organisations. If they sometimes occur in the civil service it is not because of any general lack of attention to Ministerial utterances. Indeed, there is in many civil servants an almost superstitious reverence for decisions taken at this level which, coupled with a desire not to trouble Ministers more often than need be, sometimes leads to very great, and probably undesirable rigidity.

The trouble arises rather from the sheer size and complexity of modern departmental activities and the virtual impossibility of their being adequately supervised from the top. Much, inevitably, must be left to the judgment of officials at and above principal level. Sometimes these are able to give an airy and somewhat vague political generalisation a 'local habitation and a name'. Occasionally, on the other hand, they will manage to blur unnecessarily a perfectly clear decision because they are not used to thinking on the scale required. This is to say no more than that they are human—and that they are working at or very near the margin of what is practicable. The modern state, which nurtures—and consequently pursues—the citizen from the cradle to the grave, gives Ministers and their senior officials little respite or room to manoeuvre. The slightest ambiguity in their initial statements of policy may find itself enlarged and perpetuated lower down in such a way that the more steadfastly some junior official adheres to his instructions the more arrantly he will be flouting the Minister's first intention.

There are, of course, devices for bringing to light these unconscious aberrations, and the measure of their effectiveness is the rarity of a case like that of Crichel Down, where the interests of justice were not served until there had been a damaging public enquiry. The structure of the service, the composition of its staff and the extent and character of the tasks which it has acquired, or had heaped upon it, are such that every department must have had, at one time or another, its potential Crichel Downs. 'Potential' is the interesting word. How is it that, with decisions being taken on the present scale by senior officials, and with so little

opportunity in many cases for direct access to Ministers, there are not more things done which the latter would wish publicly to repudiate, more series of muddles or injustices that reach the point of explosion?

One of the chief reasons is that there exists a by no means despicable series of safety valves and warning signals, in whose use Ministers and their most senior officials are generally most adept. The most important of these are perhaps the letters written to departments and the questions put down by Members of Parliament. These are invariably treated with a seriousness which reflects their source rather than their subject matter. They will be given distinctive files by one of the Minister's or Parliamentary Secretary's small staff of assistants in the private office, and sent, with a request for a suggested reply by such or such a date, to the division primarily concerned. The assistant secretary in charge of the division will usually ask the appropriate principal to provide the necessary information, and in most instances the latter will see to this himself. He may draw the ingredients of his suggested reply from one of his executive assistants or from an assistant principal, or discuss the matter with him or her orally. But he will generally prepare the first attempt at a reply himself. This procedure will be followed whether the Member has put down a question on some ticklish point or merely forwarded, with a word or two of introduction, an enquiry on some routine subject from one of his constituents. The reply will be carefully worded by the principal, so as either to confirm, in more persuasive terms, the line already taken or, if an error seems to have been made, to withdraw gracefully. The assistant secretary for his part, will probably wish to polish the draft, and perhaps impose upon it his own view of the extent to which existing practice can be stretched to meet the facts of this particular case, or precedent called in aid to justify the line that has been taken.

Usually these two men between them will manage to get into the suggested reply a cogent and persuasive statement of the departmental position. If maintaining this position seems to them to preclude the equitable treatment of this

or similar cases, they will probably add a covering paragraph to this effect or suggest orally to their superiors that the next opportunity should be taken to obtain legislation. But suggestions of this kind are rare. The men at the working level will generally try, at least in the first place, to squeeze the case into the shape of existing policy, or to stretch the policy to meet the case. It is not often that a single letter from a Member of Parliament or a single question in the House causes a major change of policy, though the reconsideration of existing practice which it necessitates may sometimes result in a way being found round an apparently insuperable difficulty, and the Member's intervention may thus set the tone for more imaginative or more generous treatment of similar cases in future.

In this way an isolated letter from a Member of Parliament or Parliamentary Question is sometimes more effective than might appear on the surface. It is customary to draw replies tightly—particularly those to questions asked orally in Parliament. There is a tradition that the reply must be so polished as to leave no avoidable foothold for further assaults; and senior civil servants spend some time and much ingenuity in protecting their Ministers and their Departments in this way. This practice is, of course, very useful to Ministers, and sometimes, one cannot help feeling, to Parliament itself. But in general it is not always easy to see whether this fairly general practice of choking off enquiries can really be justified, even on grounds of expediency. Sometimes an unscrupulous supplementary will be prevented or a misconceived agitation nipped in the bud. But in most instances it is probably better, in the long run, for the Department to take a Member or, in certain circumstances, the House, into its confidence, and for the Minister to explain frankly the administrative difficulties that preclude or seem to preclude a given line of action, even if this makes it possible for a Member to return to the charge and possibly open other lines of enquiry.

This is, of course, a matter for the exercise of personal judgment, and there are arguments on either side. Some Ministers and some senior advisers are, in fact, so impressed

by the need to maintain parliamentary and public goodwill that they are prepared to take minor risks in this way. But the tide does not at present run with them, and the great majority of replies given to Members, even to those belonging to the Minister's own party, are extremely guarded. They are designed to give the Minister as much immediate elbow-room as possible to manage his departmental affairs, in consultation with his Cabinet colleagues and official advisers, in the way that seems best to him; and they reflect the fairly general official view that back-benchers are fiendishly clever at inserting wedges and that, given a kindly inch one day, they are not unlikely to be found asking for a yard the next.

If the average Member of Parliament spends a great deal of his time nowadays acting as a kind of super welfare-officer and forwarding to the appropriate Minister letters relating to personal cases, he is still able, on occasion, to make some inroads into departmental policy. It may be that a new Act or set of regulations contains a flaw or anomaly which is causing hardship to a number of people, up and down the country. Or it may happen that an older enactment begins to creak very badly. In such circumstances the letters and Parliamentary Questions will reach Departments 'not single spies, but in battalions', and there will be a review of policy, first at official and then probably at Ministerial level. If there is some simple remedy it will probably be applied, and there may even be a guarded admission of official error. But if the problem is a complex or hoary one, involving perhaps a number of conflicting interests and exacerbated by past differences of practice or opinion, a solution may be longer delayed. Debates on the adjournment and press agitation may follow the first wave of questions, and the matter may be taken up by the official opposition or be made the subject of a Private Member's Bill. Even so, the Minister, having by now considered the matter very carefully, may conclude that existing policy is right and refuse to bow to the storm. But by this time the matter will have been taken out of the primarily official field and have become one for decision by Ministers themselves and their most intimate advisers.

How much officials at the highest level contribute to these quasi-political decisions is, as we have seen, not always easy to determine; but in substance the parliamentarians mounting an agitation of this kind will have secured their first objective by making sure that the decision is not taken without the active, and publically declared concurrence of the responsible Minister, or without a fairly searching enquiry into the roots of official policy. The Crichel Down case suggests that, even when this stage is reached, the right answers to all the questions asked are not always completely obvious. And it is clear that, in a large Department, exceptional perspicuity and alertness must be shown by the small band of people at the top if they are to keep all the tangled threads of departmental activity firmly in mind. This is sometimes a question of perspective. The senior official must try to acquire the ability to predict what will seem to matter to Parliament and to the press, and Ministers and their political aides must listen carefully to what their officials are able to tell them about the practical implications of their policies. In these respects both can learn a great deal, on occasion, from back-benchers, who are often in an excellent position to know from their mailbags what is going on in the constituencies and what actual or projected departmental activities are likely to trouble people.

Members of both Houses of Parliament are also in a position to keep an eye on the working of Departments, at levels where decisions are not taken by Ministers, in a number of indirect ways: as members of various national or local bodies which politely lobby Departments from time to time. A principal who has given a common-form answer to a simple-seeming letter from a local organisation or a Board of Governors (say) may well find that they number among them a querulous Peer or inquisitive M.P. Or a small deputation that comes up to Whitehall to talk about local hospital facilities or child care, or a society pressing for changes in the field of social policy, may be found to have enlisted the interest of a sympathetic Member. The value of these interventions is that they often come at unexpected angles and at or about the assistant secretary level where

Ministerial policy frequently begins to be translated into terms of day-to-day decisions. They supplement the more formal contributions of parliamentarians to the work of advisory committees and Royal Commissions which are charged from time to time with the task of helping to advise Ministers or investigating specified fields of administration. It is the informal and personal contact between the two types of men which is particularly valuable on these occasions. One can imagine a situation in which contacts of this kind between officials and politicians might proliferate at various levels and become a source of embarrassment to Ministers. But the fault at present lies, fairly obviously, in the opposite direction. Inhabitants of these two very different worlds too rarely meet, and when they do they are too often on their mettle—the official worried in advance by the prospect of having to combat a skilled and articulate advocate, and the politician prepared for evasion, indecision and reserve. It is at least arguable that more frequent contact at the working level would dispel some of these difficulties.

As things stand, there are many barriers in the way of contact of this kind. Senior civil servants are of course formally debarred from overt party activities, and this is, by any standards, inevitable. They are also, properly, debarred from close connexion with movements engaged in attempting to move Ministers on current political issues; and such social contacts as they have with parliamentarians usually exist only at the highest levels. It might therefore seem, at first sight, as if the possibility of securing a more frequent meeting of minds between the back-bencher, say, and the average assistant secretary, was not, even if desirable, likely to be very great. But, in practice, a number of contacts are made by M.P.s interested in special subjects with inhabitants of the Department or Departments chiefly concerned.

Most Departments have their particular 'lobby' of expert or interested Members. The Colonial Office and the Ministry of Education spring to mind as Departments whose affairs attract small bands of 'specialist' M.P.s who are frequently in the Department on deputations or advisory committees and whose interventions are often on functional rather than

party lines. These Members sometimes include among them some of the Minister's sharpest critics, but such is the present temperature of British politics that their personal relations with him may be excellent; and, just as some of his actions will attract expert criticism from both sides of the House, others will be genuinely, and publicly, welcomed by the Members opposite who are best qualified to judge them on their merits.

One arena in which Parliamentary observers of this calibre sometimes meet officials and pass judgment on their doings is the one provided by the sub-committees of the Estimates Committee and by the Committee of Public Accounts, which both deal, as we have seen, with the financial affairs of Departments. These investigations are not intended to take the form of an efficiency audit or to concern themselves with policy as such. But it is frequently found impossible to discuss how money is to be, or has been, spent, without pausing to pass judgment on administrative detail. The operations of these organs of Parliament are not, of course, particularly welcome to the Ministers and civil servants concerned. No one likes to have persistent and influential critics peeping over his shoulder: and it is annoying to have to spend a great deal of time defending oneself against partially informed observers. But few officials would deny that, in principle, these interventions are salutary and that they help the Treasury to keep an eye on loose or aimless expenditure, and, incidentally, on bad or wasteful administration.

If there is any ground for criticism of these arrangements generally it is probable that, here, as elsewhere, the contacts between the legislature and the workings of the executive machine are not sufficiently close or continuous. Here again, there would be dangers if things swung too far to the other extreme. No one would desire to reach a position where Government was impeded, as it is in some other countries, by too many checks and balances or where it became a common practice for M.P.s to parade on the floor of the House or in their constituencies tit-bits of information picked up inside Government departments. Any suggestion

designed to ease the relations between the legislature and the executive and thus contribute to their mutual efficiency would have to take difficulties of this kind into consideration, and would have to be such as not to impede the decision-making processes, which are already, as we shall see, terrifyingly complicated. Nevertheless, the ground seems worth exploring. One possibility, which will be elaborated later, is that the combination of forces which is now used to investigate the expenditure of public monies, and which sometimes comments, almost inadvertently, on matters affecting policy, might have its jurisdiction extended and its machinery appropriately strengthened to make it possible for it to contribute to the efficiency of administration generally. In other words, just as Treasury control in the financial field is reinforced by parliamentary committees and by a Comptroller and Auditor-General who is a creature of statute and answerable to Parliament, Treasury influence in other fields, such as, for instance, Organisation and Methods and training might be supplemented by not dissimilar machinery. There are many difficulties about this—some real, some, perhaps, imaginary—and they will be discussed in detail later. For the moment it is worth noting that there are forces here which could greatly contribute to the smooth and equitable conduct of affairs, if only they could be effectively, and safely, harnessed.

What other help does the man in the howdah get, beyond that furnished by his experience and common-sense, on those occasions when his charge begins to go astray? He is considerably, if not always consistently, assisted, as we shall see later, by a number of non-parliamentary bodies, including the Courts, the press, the Local Authorities, various professional and voluntary societies, the trade unions and, in certain circumstances, his own political party. All these bodies and persons, from the High Court Judge to the Woman's Group of the local Co-operative, are, or may be, at one time or other in a position to carry tales to the Minister about his Department—a state of affairs which, if it is often annoying and sometimes unfair to individual civil servants, is, on the whole, extremely useful to the public.

One of the difficulties about this kind of intervention, however, is that it is only fully successful where the persons criticised are at once sensitive and resourceful—able to draw the proper inferences but not likely to be panicked into rushing to the opposite extreme of error. In other words, while a man at or above principal level ought certainly to be able, generally speaking, to profit by the exposure of an error of approach in the national press, even if it had nothing to do with his own Department, there is no great likelihood that the moral will be adequately drawn at all levels. It would be interesting, for instance, to hear a group of junior or middle-grade civil servants discussing the implications of the Crichel Down case, and to try to discover precisely what effect the Treasury circular on the subject and the discussion in the press and in Parliament have had on their subsequent conduct of their official work. One may, perhaps, venture to suggest that the impact would be found to have been uneven. A minority would have drawn the obvious inference and made an effort to apply it to their daily relations, direct or indirect, with members of the public. A larger proportion would have noticed that a foreign body of some kind had been discovered in the eye of a specific Department and would have had some vague notion of its character, without sensing its practical implications. And a few would be found to have given no active thought to the matter at all.

One of the implications of this is that, as we have seen earlier, senior civil servants, and in particular, administrative civil servants, must act, not merely as faithful transmitters of ministerial decisions, but as leaders, teachers and interpreters. They do not, and cannot, assume a purely passive role. They must, by preaching and practice, put flesh on the bare bones of policy and life into the letter of enactments. Their decisions are not merely extensions of the Minister's, but smaller, independent or quasi-independent, decisions of their own, taken in the shadow of the Minister's influence certainly, and sometimes under the protection of his general announcements, but exercises of personal judgment nevertheless. And they are exercises of judgment which may

govern the activities and shape the official pronouncements of hundreds, or even thousands, of underlings, subject only to the various occasional checks we have already noticed. The importance of these administrative middle-men on the character of the Department's dealings with the public—of the assistant secretary who is working out arrangements for dealing in sugar or the man in the Ministry of National Insurance who is shaping insurance policy—may be immense. This is brought out in evidence given to the Royal Commission on the Civil Service by the Permanent Secretary to the Ministry of Food, Sir Henry Hancock. After describing in some detail the tasks performed by some of his assistant secretaries, Sir Henry said:

'I could go on illustrating from divisions that there are big jobs to be done. The thinking, the planning, the co-ordination, the meetings with other Departments, the consultation of interests are largely carried out by the assistant secretaries concerned. They have been helped; matters occasionally have to come up to the Minister, to myself, to the under secretary or one of the deputy secretaries concerned, but I think it is fair to say that certainly in the Ministry of Food we have kept things down as far as we possibly can, if only because of the volume of work.'

Sir Henry was subsequently asked, in effect, where the real weight of responsibility lay, and the following exchanges are worth quoting verbatim:

'*Sir Alexander Gray:* Could you elaborate one point, Sir Henry? You said it is obvious that a certain number of questions are referred forward to the under secretary and so on.——Yes.

'Can you give us any idea of the sort of proportion? My experience is that it varies a great deal from one man to another. Do you find that some of these people are willing and prepared to settle practically the whole thing themselves? ——Yes.

'Others are somewhat more diffident and send forward a bigger proportion?——Yes. It requires very nice judgment. An assistant secretary who does not refer some things

forward may get himself into worse trouble than if he does, provided he sends it forward with a solution, or at least a recommended solution. The under secretary usually comes in when you get questions of rather contentious policy affecting a number of Departments; and there, of course, you have from time to time to take discussions at a higher level. But the thinking and the planning in all these instances has been done largely at the assistant secretary level, as it should be, with the help of the supporting administrative, executive and technical staff.

'What I should like to get clear in my own mind, though I know it is very difficult, is how far at each stage a civil servant refers up to the next grade. Would you agree with this, that a wise principal or assistant secretary ought to refer forward a great deal for two reasons, firstly for guidance, and secondly to keep the man above informed?——It is as great a fault not to refer up in a good case as to refer up in inappropriate cases. You have to hold the balance, and that is an art.

'There is no guidance as to what should be done except commonsense and experience?——It is experience and commonsense, and I think a certain flair which you develop over the years.

'*Chairman:* The thing which comes out of this, Sir Henry, is that today the assistant secretary has at least as important and difficult a job as he had in the old days pre-war. Which I can remember very well, because I came into the service in 1920 and have been through a number of Departments. I can assess, I think, my own jobs when I was at that level pretty well and, quite frankly, there are a good many jobs in the Ministry of Food at the moment that I would not have been too ready to tackle!

'Would you agree that, the tendency of things being what it is, the work of the service must go on becoming more and more difficult?——I should say that you get your high-water marks, and when the tide recedes each time the low water mark is higher than the time before. The volume of work is continuing and its difficulty is going to increase, partly because of the complexity of the subjects and partly

because of the very much keener sensitivity on the part of the public to Government action. In my early days in the Ministry of Labour we had a certain amount of correspondence about unemployment insurance and a heavy volume it was considered in those days. We regarded ourselves as overloaded when we got a postbag of a few hundred letters. Nowadays in a social service department the post-bags run to tens of thousands.

'The size of the postbag does not perhaps matter very much if you have a form to answer them! But the point I would rather put to you is whether legislation and its results are becoming more and more complicated?——I think there are more and more complicated things, spreading over a wider and wider field.'

There is little mention of Ministers in all this, or of policy seeping down from the top. And it is quite clear that in large areas of many Departments problems are dealt with at or about assistant secretary level as they bubble up from below, with only occasional references of difficult or contentious matters to the highest levels. This is inevitable with Departments as large as they are today and with the volume and complexity of public business constantly increasing. The President of the Board of Trade has in his Department some seventy assistant secretaries and twice as many principals. The Minister of Supply has about forty and seventy-five respectively, together with very large numbers of technical advisers. The former has in his Department over 7,000 non-industrial civil servants, the latter some 33,000. It is quite impossible for the Ministers concerned personally to oversee and to imprint their judgments on the actions and decisions of all these subordinates. There must, in other words, be moments when, if the elephant is not to take a false step (or to trumpet inconveniently at the wrong moment) something more than the presence of the man in the howdah, or the virtuosity of the mahout, or the activities of the ever-watchful attendants is needed—when one must rely, in effect, on the instincts and habits of the animal itself.

Successive Ministers do, of course, contribute greatly to the development of these departmental attitudes. The

influence of a capable Minister may well spread far beyond his immediate entourage, and the legend may persist long after the man has gone. A man does not usually rise to political eminence without learning a great deal about the art of influencing people. In general, however, a Minister's direct impact will be exerted only on a few people in his Department, and much of his success will depend, as we have seen, on his ability to make them into conductors of his attitudes and opinions. Apart from the Permanent Secretary and perhaps the Deputy Secretary or Deputy Secretaries, the closest of his departmental associates will frequently be his private secretary. The latter will generally be a young man, often a principal, who is reckoned likely to scale the heights of the service. He will be in daily contact with the Minister, explaining detailed points arising out of briefs, obtaining answers to questions put by his master and generally acting as an honest broker between the Minister and his political associates on the one hand and the official Heads of the Department on the other. A number of the present Permanent and Deputy Secretaries are men who had opportunities in their youth of rubbing shoulders with Ministers in this way, and who had much of their early tuition at their hands and at the hands of the able officials who surrounded them.

Ministerial influences are less often transmitted directly to assistant secretaries or principals or to more junior officers in the Department. Unless an assistant secretary happens to have charge of a Bill or of a division whose affairs are constantly irrupting into political significance he will seldom exchange more than a few words with the political Heads of the Department, and most principals will have to be content with a glimpse of the Minister as he makes a hurried tour of his Department on taking office or awards the prizes at the departmental sports. As for junior members of the staff, Ministers will frequently remain for them mere names in the newspapers, to be judged more by their published speeches and by their party affiliations than by any overt evidence of their quality as administrators or departmental Ministers.

Nor do Ministers, in general, put a great deal on paper. If a point is raised by a Cabinet colleague, say, or by some outside body close to the Minister he may call for a note on it. This will be prepared by the division concerned and polished at a higher level. When he has read it the Minister may scribble a question or two in the margin, or write a few words indicating agreement, or he may discuss it briefly with the officials primarily concerned. But the note will be so drafted as to make it unnecessary for him, unless he violently disagrees with the whole basis of it, to say much more than 'Yes' or 'No', or 'Let us give him what he wants', or 'We must be careful here'.

Ministers, as a race, are scribblers, authors of marginalia and of invitations to informal discussion. Very few of them find time while in office to write original memoranda or instructions of any length. They will check the drafts of their subordinates, sometimes meticulously, master their briefs and seize with disturbing perspicacity on inconsistencies in stories presented to them. But they are usually too busy to originate—at least on paper.

How far this necessity of accepting the words of others may put a Minister in the hands of the officials it is difficult to say. Certainly he will sometimes appear to be so, and there will be cases where a popular politician seems, on assuming office, to disappear behind a barricade of polite evasions erected for him by his officials. The change will be apparent, not real, but it will be somewhat disturbing to the faithful party workers in the constituencies who find their letters answered, over the signature of the Minister, certainly, but in language of which they had never thought him capable and with a touch of coldness which is as unwelcome as it is unexpected. The simple explanation will be, of course, that a Minister cannot draft all his own letters. He must very often rely on his officials for the phrasing, as well as for the content, of replies to correspondence; and however often he makes known the turn of phrase or the style he prefers he will not always be able—even if he wishes to do so—to disguise the fact than many of the letters he signs from day to day are not, substantially, his at all.

A more serious matter, which arises from the fact that the Minister and his Parliamentary Secretary are two among many, is that problems will sometimes be put to them in a form which falsely purports to cover the whole range of possibilities and to offer a number of exhaustive alternatives. A wary Minister will know that this is not always the case and that there are more things in heaven and earth than are always thought of in official philosophy; but he will not always have the time or opportunity to explore the matter thoroughly for himself. Every now and then, acting on a hunch, perhaps, or on a hint from outside the Department, he will decide to look behind the official brief, read all the papers and if necessary talk to the officials concerned with the case. The efficiency with which he conducts occasional enquiries of this kind and the accuracy with which he is able to weigh up his immediate advisers will help to determine the extent to which he is able to make his writ run effectively in the Department. He will be greatly helped in all this if he comes to the Department with a reputation for drive and efficiency and if his stock is high among his political colleagues. It may also be possible for him to strengthen his position, if he feels it necessary to do so, by judicious selection of the successors to such of his chief officials as retire or are transferred to other Departments during his term of office.

The picture of Ministers that emerges from all this is of a group of men secure enough and loyally served, but not always altogether happy in the circumstances of their high office. Departments are too big, the range of their activities too wide, the number and variety of their servants too great for Ministers always to be as free to spend time on new and considered policies as one would wish. And, however hard senior officials and Ministers themselves work at the perennial task of disentangling the threads of policy, these have an embarrassing habit of getting tangled again. This is, it must be said, the fault of no one in particular. It is a by-product of the tasks that the modern state has assumed, and part and parcel of the pace and complexity of modern life.

Is there, then, nothing to be done about it? Must Ministers and their immediate advisers be more and more over-worked, with less and less time to pause and take stock of events or to execute those bold and timely changes of direction that are the prerogative of men who control events and are not controlled by them? Must less senior officials become more and more masters of depressing detail, clutching with less and less faith at the hems of policy? Is there no way out? There are, of course, a number of palliatives. It may be desirable for instance to alter the boundaries of Departments, to provide an extra Minister at a point where pressure is heaviest, yet keep the number of Departments within bounds by amalgamating two Departments when the moment of stress is past. These problems relate to what is now officially known as 'machinery of government' and it is the responsibility of the Treasury (which has a machinery of government branch) to help to solve them. The various committees of the Cabinet, and interdepartmental committees of various kinds can also be used from time to time in such a way as to ease the work of Ministers, while keeping them and their immediate assistants in touch with events. Parliament, the Treasury, Ministers themselves, and indeed the public and the press can to some extent ease the situation by turning their faces against new extensions of governmental activity, unless these are obviously unavoidable, and by keeping a sharp eye on existing activities with a view to seeing that they are discontinued when the need for them has passed.

But it is fairly clear that, to be of real use, the remedy must go down to the working level and affect the actions—and eventually reduce the numbers—of junior civil servants. It must make it possible for everyone in the chain of command to have that little something in reserve that enables him to see round the problems raised by his work, to do things in the simplest and most direct way possible, to know why they are done, to stop doing them the moment they are no longer necessary—and, above all, to see what is impossible and to refrain from doing it! Much of the time and money and human effort that are being employed to small advantage in various corners of the service today are being expended

by people who have been set to do things which, given their own limitations and those of the people they must deal with, are either impossible or not worth doing. The chief executive officer presiding over a chaos of fees, the principal, patching with immense subtlety, an obsolete Act, the executive officer expounding fine points of law to people who merely want fair play, are all people who have been put at unnecessary hurdles because someone at or near the summit of the service was too terribly busy, or too preoccupied with other and weightier matters, to look at their particular sector with all the attention which, in an ideal service, one would wish.

We have seen enough of the service in previous chapters to appreciate that a simplification and clarification of its work is unlikely to be achieved from outside, though pressure of the right kind in the right place may sometimes be useful. Much of what has to be done must be done within Departments; and it must be done patiently and ingloriously by busy officials of the middle grades, from assistant secretary, shall we say, down to higher executive officer, who must somehow find time to simplify and cut down the size of the machinery of administration. There are ways in which this movement may be stimulated, but it is the manner of thinking that is all important. The administrator must continually ask himself, not only 'Is this desirable and could I do it properly myself', but, 'Is it inescapable, and will it be done effectively by the officers to whom I must entrust it?' And he must ask this question, not only of new projects but of old ones, not only of those that thrust themselves upon his attention, but of those that persist in lying quietly just out of sight. And having asked himself these questions and, as he sometimes will, having got answers that make something he is asked to do look useless or ridiculous or dishonest, he must tell his superiors why this seems to him to be so. It has been said by an American authority that an administrator's duties include telling his masters, on occasion, things they do not want to hear. This is a maxim that our own administrators must not overlook, if we are to have a tauter, cheaper, more efficient and more humane civil service.

CHAPTER VII

Relations with the Law and the Organised Public

In this chapter we shall describe very briefly the part played by civil servants in making and administering the law—functions they share with Ministers and Parliament on the one hand and the Courts on the other—and then go on to discuss their 'horizontal' relations with various people outside the service belonging to or representing the organisations that comprise the 'special publics' of the respective Departments. And we shall conclude with a word or two about their relations with that most special of special publics, the press.

Senior civil servants collaborate with Ministers and with the Cabinet, as we have seen, in preparing new legislation. The larger and more complicated the Bill, the higher the level at which the more important decisions affecting it are likely to be made. A minor, consolidating measure, which does no more than tidy the existing law, may well be dealt with mainly at principal or assistant secretary level. In such a case a senior member of the executive class may do a great deal of the devilling, assisted, possibly, by an assistant principal. The principal and assistant secretary concerned, in consultation with the Department's legal advisers, will be likely to take most of the detailed decisions that need to be taken within the Department.

If, on the other hand, new legislation is being prepared, the assistant secretary whose division it concerns, or who, if it affects a number of divisions, is in charge of the Bill, will play an important part in its development. But decisions

on the awkward and more political parts of it will usually be taken at a higher level. Not only will the Permanent Secretary and the Minister himself be concerned with the wording of successive drafts of the more awkward or controversial clauses, but interests outside the Departments—Local Authorities, for instance, trade unions and trade associations—may have to be consulted in confidence as to the practicability of specific proposals. The Department's own legal adviser will also be closely concerned with the drafting of the Bill and with the massive correspondence with Parliamentary Counsel that will certainly take place as successive prints are prepared and the Bill passes through the two Houses. The Legal Adviser and one of the Department's most senior administrators, as well as the Parliamentary Secretary or the Minister himself, will generally be on hand whenever there is any possibility of the Bill's being debated; and the way in which this team manages the Bill may well have a vital effect on the shape in which it reaches the statute book, and on the precise degree of freedom the Minister and his successors enjoy in operating the Act in later years. Almost invariably a number of amendments will be put down at the crucial stages of a Bill's passage through the two Houses, and Ministers must sometimes decide very quickly, and so must their Departments, which they can accept and what Government amendments must be put down to plug any gaps which are discovered in the course of the debates.

By the time a major enactment has passed into law, the Minister, who will perhaps have jotted down its main heads—alone or in consultation with his senior advisers—nine months or a year before, will usually find that his original intentions have been modified, at least in detail, and that his original wording has entirely disappeared. He and his advisers will sometimes find, too, and so will Parliament, that words and phrases in Acts of Parliament are not always taken by the courts to mean quite what they were intended to mean. Generally speaking, however, the contents of a piece of major legislation introduced unter his auspices will closely reflect the Minister's own views. He will have had

some part in drafting the more contentious clauses, and although the words, as they emerge, will not be his own, the Bill will be in substance his, and the arguments he uses in the House, if trimmed and garnished by his advisers, will generally be essentially his own.

This is not true of minor or highly technical legislation, and when one comes to consider the preparation of Orders in Council and statutory instruments of various kinds one discovers that Ministers have rather less to say, and their advisers much more. There is an occasional fuss in Parliament about a piece of delegated legislation, and an equally occasional Ministerial intervention but the form and content of these documents are usually, though not always, largely determined by the Minister's administrative and legal advisers. If the regulations are of general interest to the Department the Permanent Secretary will have a hand in their preparation. But if they are of minor importance and have no very obvious political implications they may well be settled by an assistant secretary, making only rare references to a higher level.

There is, as everyone knows, a great deal of this delegated legislation nowadays, largely because of the size of the administrative tasks that confront the modern state; and much of it is highly complicated. It is almost impossible for Parliament to keep a fully effective watch on it, though the appropriate committee, or some sharp-eyed back-bencher, may occasionally notice an anomalous or objectionably vague or widely drawn provision here or there. In this field it is the bureaucrat, not the legislator, who is usually the expert. The former has an intimate knowledge of the background to the document in question—what has been said before, how the existing regulations have worked, what changes are intended. The latter is the outsider, armed merely with an explanatory note and possibly with a word or two of warning, put before him at the last minute by an interested constituent. Even if he is a lawyer, the fact will avail him little, unless he happens to have some practical knowledge of the field covered by the offending legislation.

In some cases, the Minister and his closest advisers are in almost the same position. The subject may be a complex one, the work of the branch concerned something of a mystery, to be mastered only by long experience, and the legislative background tangled or obscure. In such circumstances the Minister may be fully briefed as to the general intention of the instrument in question, but he will often have to rely on the opinion of the assistant secretary, or possibly even the principal or senior executive officer chiefly concerned, as to what precisely needs to be done. Very often the shape of delegated legislation and the effect it will have on the public, organised and unorganised, outside the service, are largely determined at or about assistant secretary level. In this way, senior officials are often the unacknowledged legislators of statutory provisions which other, slightly junior, officials will later regard as sacrosanct. 'The Minister is bound by the regulations', they will write, without a qualm, or, 'The Department is not in a position to accede to your request', when the cause of the difficulty is in fact a statutory Rule or Order made, not so long ago, on the advice of an official not much senior to, and not remarkably unlike, themselves—and one which could be unmade or altered on the same advice.

Sometimes rigidities of this kind come, not from regulations which have had the sanction of Parliament, but from directions given, either under some umbrella authority or without statutory sanction at all. Fees frequently grow up, and appear to become justified, as time goes on, by paper instructions of long standing, in this way; and not all civil servants are in the habit of pausing to distinguish what is done by specific statutory authority from what is governed by various administrative accretions. Junior civil servants will often be found quoting to the public, and even to the legal profession, rules which have been invented in the Department. And, as everyone knows who has had experience at this level, it is the customary lore, the venerable departmental tradition, the word of the familiar supervisor that carries real weight with the people who deal with day-to-day business within Departments. The question asked

will not be, 'What did Parliament say?' 'Has the Minister a discretion?' 'Is this *ultra vires*?', but, 'Is it likely to make trouble for the Department?' 'Has it been done before?' 'Can we get away with it?'

Approaches of this kind are seldom consciously unhelpful, still less dishonest. Sometimes the officials concerned will be stretching their points, or indulging in their minor wangles or self-deceits specifically to help some member of the public over a stile which the law has, as if by accident, thrust in his way. The difficulty is that when things of this kind are done by middle-grade civil servants their decisions may well become the basis for rules and precedents which will be enforced by their subordinates with all the rigidity of Acts of Parliament. There can be few principals or senior executive officers who have not sometimes blushed to see their own words repeated in some unexpected or unjustifiable context, or their own precepts applied in such a way as to make nonsense of them.

When it comes to the enforcement of the law, civil servants are almost always subject in the last resort to correction by the courts. This jurisdiction is, however, exerted only intermittently and at the fringes. There is a vast hinterland of administrative and quasi-legal activity which is seldom investigated by a court of law. A department may have statutes that have been running for over a hundred years, with only the most trifling changes. Yet no more than a handful of decided cases may have arisen in all that time out of these statutes and their consequential regulations. In other areas, of course, decisions come thick and fast, sometimes because the existing legislation is defective, sometimes, as in the case of compulsory purchase, because of the inherent difficulty of the situation.

Usually, most of the expert knowledge about a piece of legislation lies within the Department primarily concerned with it. There will be papers showing what the draftsman thought various clauses meant and what was said about them in Parliament. There will be reports of decided cases and notes as to how they arose. There will be opinions culled from time to time from the Department's own legal advisers

or, exceptionally, from the Law Officers of the Crown. And there will be accounts of the working of the Act over the decades by the administrators and others most closely concerned with its practical application. These precedents will, if kept in order and readily available when required, usually give the branch concerned a fair idea of the way a Court would decide a given case, and will enable them to exercise such quasi-judicial functions as come their way with a large measure of consistency and without much fear of having a writ of mandamus issued against them.

Here again, it is, curiously enough, the lay civil servant, not the lawyer, who is generally the expert. And when a civil servant begins a letter, as he not infrequently does, by saying that the Minister is not empowered to give an authoritative opinion as to the effect of this or that provision, the opinion that follows is usually well worth reading all the same. In fact the civil service appears to do this part of its work, much of it in the law and order and social service sectors, faithfully and well, if with a certain rigidity which, as we have seen, derives not so much from the letter of the law as from official habit and idiosyncrasy. Experience shows that where a department has a jurisdiction parallel to that of a Court it is not always the Court which is best informed as to the precise requirements of the statutes, or the more consistent or, for that matter, the more cautious.

This is, after all, inevitable. A judge's knowledge must range far wider than that of the senior executive officer or principal who is dealing from day to day with a particular body of Acts and regulations. Furthermore, it is quite possible that the interpretation of some detailed provision will have to be taken at short notice, *en passant*, as it were, by the Court, which will have to rely largely on the submissions of counsel in the case and will not have before it detailed background information of the kind that is available within the Department. Nor will it have on hand, as the Department often will, notes of unreported cases disclosing the view taken by other Courts of the regulation or enactment concerned. Departmental caution in the exercise of quasi-judicial functions is also quite understandable. The

Department is not a court of law. Its function is faithfully to reflect what has gone before—not to indulge in speculation as to what a Court might say at some future time or (it is arguable) to point out that the legislators appear, in certain instances, to have made asses of themselves.

Civil servants do not, in general, like to have too much to do with the Courts—particularly in the role of witnesses. With few exceptions, they do not appear in Court often enough to become familiar with Court procedure, and they are very conscious of the fact that a judge who happens not to be particularly well disposed towards laymen who can also claim to be experts may, if he wishes, give them a very rough passage. They are well aware, too, that if a judge does make an unfriendly comment the press is not in the least likely to overlook it, and that if the brick they are alleged to have dropped is a big one, questions in Parliament may well follow. They are thus in what is for them the unusual position of having the odds stacked against them, and they will usually keep out of Court if they can, even where they feel that full enquiry into all the facts might well cause their action or decision to be upheld.

This has the double-edged effect of inducing great caution in middle grade civil servants where legal or quasi-legal matters are concerned. They like to be able to point to precedents and, in view of the known habit of some judges of dealing severely with official witnesses, they are, in general, careful these days not to be found pursuing a member of the public unfairly or pushing their powers beyond what they conceive to be their legal limits. Thus, the comparatively few well publicised cases, where civil servants have been criticised for acts of petty oppression have had the effect of making thousands of other officials stop well short of what the law allows. This has the excellent effect of curbing the 'insolence of office', and it helps to ensure that the great mass of this quasi-legal work is done by civil servants, not only cheaply and with consistency, but with some discretion and humanity.

There is, unfortunately, another aspect to the matter. The civil servant's healthy respect for the Courts, re-enforced by official habit and conditioning, makes him, on occasion,

wooden and over-cautious, adhering to the letter of some obsolescent law, or boggling over an insignificant detail which most Courts would probably find a way of ignoring. It is less in individual cases than in its contagious effect on official thinking that this by-product of dealings with the Courts is sometimes dangerous. There are, in fact, departments close to the law, and branches concerned primarily with legal matters, which sometimes appear to carry this exaggerated respect for precedent and this supremely sceptical approach to innovation not only into their case work but into their general policy. It is easy for civil servants, with their eyes on the Courts from day to day, to forget that they are, as servants of the executive, required to assist in the creation, not only in the administration and interpretation of the law. It is not always the layman well versed in a branch of the law who is most ready to see its defects; and it is not in the least easy for a man who is administering a body of regulations as a going concern to see what needs to be done to bring it into line with movements of policy or changes in the climate of opinion outside the Department. It is to problems of this kind, of course, that the flexible administrative officer is expected to bring a fresh mind from time to time, and frequently he does. But the task is not an easy one, and it is not one that can readily be performed without the active assistance of the junior officers who are better versed in the practice of the branch in question.

Within this frame of reference, the great mass of work arising from the interpretation and enforcement of statutes is performed by members of the clerical and executive classes. Most of it is done by correspondence, and the first impact of the in-coming letter, be it from a solicitor, member of the public, Local Authority or other body concerned with this aspect of the law, will generally be taken by a clerical or junior executive officer. If it fits into an easily recognisable category—or seems to—the case will probably be dealt with by means of a form or stock letter, which will go up to the higher executive officer, if at all, only for signature. If it presents some slightly unusual feature, or if it

appears that someone, having been given the stock answer, is questioning it, the case will probably be minuted to the higher executive officer, who may draft a letter himself. Letters drafted and signed at or below higher executive officer level are not, generally speaking, remarkable for their imaginative insight or lightness of touch. They are not, generally speaking, expected to be. What is expected, and is of course indispensable at this level, where the great mass of routine correspondence arising out of Acts, regulations and departmental instructions has to be dealt with, is accuracy and adherence to the known path. What the overworked head of branch frequently feels he needs in his subordinates concerned with work of this kind is steadiness, not brilliance. If he has been through this particular mill himself, as will often be the case, it is particularly likely that he will look for the kind of junior who is naturally a little conservative and can be relied on to do what his instructions tell him, without chasing too many hares and looking round too many corners. He may feel, too, that this somewhat unimaginative approach is precisely what many correspondents, particularly those in the legal profession, are used to, have come to respect and rather like and that they, for their part, are not unduly accustomed to the employment of sympathy and imagination. He will contend that the average solicitor or solicitor's clerk does not want a would-be-helpful letter, long-windedly putting the matter in perspective and full of ifs and buts. 'What a lawyer wants', he will assert, 'is a straightforward, rather flat letter, setting out that part of the statute or regulations that affects the case and what can or cannot be done. Answer the question put', he will add. 'Don't go in for frills, and don't jump too many fences at once. The less said to a lawyer soonest mended.'

This attitude, or something like it, informs a great deal of the regulatory and interpretative work done by the civil service, both in the older departments and in the newer, social service sector, and it can sometimes be detected in letters to other civil servants, to Local Authorities and to other bodies outside the legal profession, as well as in letters to solicitors. There is obviously a great deal in it, from the

point of view of the man who does not want trouble, either for himself or his Department, and it has grown up, not in any sense capriciously, but in response to what have been felt to be the requirements of the situation. In matters of this kind one cannot take risks unless one is prepared to pay for them in terms of time and trouble. Answers must be safe. No loopholes must be left for further correspondence. No admissions must be made that may afterwards be found inconvenient, and statements made from time to time must not be mutually inconsistent. Since each case cannot easily be thought out *ab initio* in such a way as to produce an answer that satisfies these requirements an immense framework of forms, stock drafts and departmental precedents and instructions has been devised, with a view to keeping the junior officers who answer the great bulk of the letters, somehow or other, on the right lines.

In most departments which have this kind of work to do the system works fairly well, if slowly and at times harshly; and it is seldom possible for an outsider to suggest ready-made solutions to the difficulties the system exists to circumvent. At the same time, there are obvious dangers. One is the tendency that has already been noticed for the executive or clerical staff to give all instructions equal weight—feeling themselves just as finally stopped from giving a correspondent what he wants by a departmental instruction as by an Act of Parliament. This is natural enough. The instruction is just as much part of the junior officer's frame of reference as is the Act of Parliament; and it would take much careful training and painstaking supervision to teach him that, while both must, in general, be obeyed, there is often a very good case for looking at the departmental instructions afresh when one is dealing with one of those hard cases that are sometimes made by bad laws. People are, unfortunately, often denied something, or put to inordinate trouble before they get it, because the law, which would let them have it, has been encrusted by a long growth of departmental decisions to be on the safe side or to make matters easier for the local officers of the Department. It is the easiest thing in the world, unless one exercises

constant vigilance, and sees that one has excellent staff, to allow the law to decline from being a fine tool to appearing the bluntest of blunt instruments.

Another danger is compartmentalism. Most of the more senior executives, and some of the junior administrators, who supervise work of this kind are people who have come up, step by step, within a single department, and sometimes within a single branch. Many of them will know the work of the branch and its direct implications very well, and the better of them will have a fair idea of the work done by similar branches in the Department and in other departments on its flanks. But only the very best of them—and most of these will by now have worked their way well up into the administrative ranks—will have much idea of how their work fits into the general legal, administrative and social pattern—or of what that elusive and ever-changing pattern is. Nor will they usually be very active in keeping up with movements of opinion outside the Department—among the people in the Local Authorities and voluntary societies, for instance, who could be their natural allies. Partly for this reason, and partly because the task of co-ordination is, in many instances, extremely difficult, the activities of the branches and departments engaged in this kind of work are not always as well-timed or as well co-ordinated as they might be; and the right hand occasionally gives the appearance of being a little unsure as to what the left hand is doing.

Difficulties of this kind can be illustrated by the fate of the awkward sort of letter that does not raise a single problem but extends into the provinces of a number of departments. A solicitor has a client, shall we say, who is the wife of a man who is alleged to be from Eire, to have joined the forces of Her Majesty, to have deserted and to have assumed a false name. The woman is in trouble over a hundred and one things, mostly to do with identity and documentation. Her medical and national health insurance cards, her marriage certificate and her passport are all in the false name. So is her child's birth certificate. Several branches of several departments will be concerned with a case of this kind and it is

most unlikely that a single letter, setting out his client's difficulties in general terms will get the solicitor very far. If he does try this approach he is almost sure to find that the Department he writes to will confine itself strictly to its own piece of the jig-saw and leave him to start from scratch with the others. If he or his clerks are experienced in the ways of the service he may couch his first letter in terms which invite a telephone conversation or an invitation to an interview, in which case, in a complicated business of this kind, he and his client are likely to get much further much quicker. Or he may strike on an unusually helpful official who will voluntarily help him to put his client's story to the right people in the other departments concerned, thus making the one approach trigger off all the desired actions. Things of this kind do happen and are perhaps beginning to happen a little more frequently nowadays; but, for the reasons already discussed, they are still exceptional. The junior civil servant dealing with case work is still not generally encouraged to spoon-feed the public, still less their legal advisers. He is expected rather to stick to his departmental last and not 'go looking for trouble'—even where this careful attitude means, in the long run, more trouble for everyone, including the Department.

Another, fundamental, difficulty is that there are so many statutes and statutory instruments, so many regulations and so many circulars and departmental instructions, old and new, that even the experts cannot always confidently find their way about them or say with precision what they all mean. Asked an apparently innocuous question about the regulations governing property found in public transport vehicles, a Minister said in the House recently:

'the number of different regulations, administrative orders and statutory provisions which cover this subject is quite appalling when one goes into the matter'.

The trouble is that this is so true of so many parts of the civil service that it is difficult in many cases to find anyone who can spare time to 'go into the matter', and that as the years pass the problems gather more and more moss

(the precedent files of one branch of one quite small office would now stretch, if laid end to end, from Whitehall to Shepherd's Bush) until it is a brave man who dares to tackle them at all.

If this kind of thing gives a Minister to pause it is obviously quite beyond a junior civil servant to give all the people all the right answers all the time. The cautious and sober traditions of the service, and the pains it has been at to preserve records for his guidance will usually prevent him from making too many obvious errors. But these devices, however skilfully used—and their use is one of the things in which most middle grade civil servants really do excel—is no substitute for a thorough intellectual grasp, at all appropriate levels, of the problems that are being dealt with. In some cases there is, unfortunately, a vicious circle. There are too many instructions because there are too many civil servants; and there are too many civil servants because there are too many instructions. There can be few supervisors, in the branches dealing with case work of this kind, who do not sometimes wish, as they read through files made thick with difficulties by their subordinates, that they could, like Gideon, retain only a few selected followers and 'let all the other people go every man unto his place'. In some offices simplification of the work and reduction of staff can in fact go hand in hand, but this usually necessitates patience, full support from above and a willingness to take related and consequential steps, such as, for instance, repealing old enactments and getting new ones, and admitting in some cases that what has previously been attempted is too difficult or that certain results would not be worth the price one would have to pay for them. This last will sometimes mean letting the public off something in theory that one has never been able to get them to do in practice, or ceasing to draw some distinction that has long-since been virtually meaningless. Such exercises in realism are good for the official soul; and it is generally much better, in the long run, to hold a few central positions than to try to enforce one's jurisdiction in areas where no one, inside or outside the office, really believes in it.

But it is not often open to civil service supervisors, be they Permanent Secretaries or principals, to lighten ship in this way. Sometimes, here and there, a little ballast can be thrown overboard, but few people in the service are in a position of such independence that they can bring to projected administrative or legislative arrangements the attitude of mind which argues, 'This sounds difficult; perhaps it had better not be tried'. One of the greatest difficulties about the civil service is that so many of its members are such good triers. They will take an old, patched-up enactment that deserves to be scrapped and, somehow, contrive to make it work. And they will face tasks of appalling complexity, at the sight of which most people outside the service would—quite rightly—quail, and make some show of performing them. Despite the efforts of those concerned with organisation and methods and the obvious needs of the situation it would be foolishly optimistic to believe that the tide in the service is as yet running in the direction of simplicity and modesty. New and complicated regulations, which even official flesh and blood can scarcely contemplate, are still being made practically every day—not because anyone consciously wants complexity or because the lawyers and administrators who do the drafting are incapable of clear exposition, but because this is all part of a machine whose wheels have been turning for a very long time and because no one is strong enough or knowledgeable enough, or sure enough of his superiors' support, to insist on radical simplification and on the suppression of minor functions which alone could begin to reduce some parts of the service to manageable proportions.

So that part of the service machinery which rests on statutes and delegated legislation grinds on, without much reference to first principles or to movements outside the service, except where they thrust themselves upon its notice. No more than can be helped goes up beyond executive level, and references to the legal advisers of the various departments are, generally speaking, few and far between. On most matters the branches usually rely on their own collections of precedents, garnered over the years, and it is

in the best traditions of such precedent systems to have decisions pointing either way, which can be produced, like rabbits out of hats, to justify which ever line is decided upon. The ordinary run of correspondence in this field is dealt with by the minders of the machine according to their habitual lights. It is only when a case refuses to fit, or something goes wrong, or the enquirer is manifestly powerful or unusually persistent that the case is likely to be dealt with at a higher level.

We have seen that the service has its own means of dealing with enquiries from Members of Parliament and other persons close to Ministers, and we shall see later that it has devised means of communicating with the press. In the meantime we must consider what happens to the case which without having quite so powerful a sponsor, still manages to distinguish itself from the ruck and get itself dealt with by some relatively senior official. Cases are promoted in this way across the whole range of the service's work, but the sector we have just been considering, which contains an immense amount of case work of varying degrees of complexity, provides exceptionally good examples of this process and of the use of what is generally termed the 'semi-official approach'.

Since the service is exceedingly large, and since its machinery has most of the usual faults of big machines, and since its controllers are unable at present to do anything very dramatic about it, they have found it necessary to devise ways and means of dealing at a rather quicker tempo, and somewhat more flexibly, with certain matters. There are, not one, but many ways of doing this, and to outsiders beginning to learn its ways, the service must sometimes appear to have as many layers and as many skins as Peer Gynt's onion.

The most frequent callers at the back or side doors, so to speak, of a Government Department are, of course, civil servants from other offices. A higher executive officer will ring up his, or her, counterpart in another Ministry and have a chat about a case of mutual interest. A senior executive officer will write semi-officially so as to get some-

thing done with a minimum of trouble or delay. A principal will get in touch with a fellow principal. As one nears the top of the service these inter-departmental contacts become more frequent, more important, and, in many ways, easier. One will usually get a looser, less stiff and less guarded response to a semi-official approach if one is dealing with a principal, say, than if one is concerned with a higher executive officer. He is less likely to know, off-hand, the precise answer to your question, but he will, generally speaking, appear rather more ready to try to help you. Some of the older executives—though by no means all of them—still appear to be more than a little worried by extra-departmental enquiries of an informal character. They have been brought up in the tradition of writing just as formally to other civil servants as to members of the public, and they sometimes prefer to say, 'Sir, I am directed by the Minister to state . . . ' even if they know very well that they are only writing to old Bill Snooks across the way in Great Charles Street. It is among the administrators, particularly those from the universities, that there is more evidence of an understanding that sometimes cuts across departmental barriers—much as the common standards of the ruling classes in feudal times appear from time to time to have transcended national boundaries.

There is, then, a great deal of 'Dear Smithing' among the administrators, a great deal of talking over the telephone and writing of informal letters. And the same technique is commonly used in their dealings with people of roughly equal status outside the service—with secretaries of large organisations, senior local government officers, professional or academic people interested in the work of the Department and other influential representatives of its organised or special public. When the contact is a petitioner from outside the service the letters are usually a little more reserved, and the heading becomes, 'Dear Mr. Smith', but the subscription is generally 'Yours sincerely' and the approach is practically the same. The game is a subtle one, with its own reservations and hesitations. There are formalities within informalities. An assistant principal will write to a principal, one step up

the ladder, in this way, but seldom to an assistant secretary and scarcely ever to an under secretary. Nor are there many contacts of this kind across class barriers, except in the case of principals and the most senior executives. A higher executive officer in one department, for instance, would scarcely think of writing to a principal in another in this way.

The world in which exchanges of this kind—simple, direct, informal and unpretentious—take place, is a microcosm of the service as a whole. It bears the same kind of relation to the great departmental machines as Berne does, shall we say, to London—or the end game in chess to the opening opposition of serried pawns and minor pieces. Many things are possible to the inhabitants of this slightly rarefied world which could not at present be managed on a larger scale. Hints can be dropped, nods accepted in lieu of winks; letters answered by return of post, mistakes admitted or explained, fruitless enquiries headed off over the telephone, differences ventilated and compromises worked out in an amiable atmosphere, sophisticated arguments deployed and occasional exceptions, 'not to be regarded as precedents', allowed. This is an invaluable annexe to the service, which does not usually present itself to the casual enquirer, an indispensable lubricant without which the machine would doubtless creak a great deal more than it does. But how does one make use of it? By what gate, and with what tickets, is it possible to make one's way into its precincts? Is it a matter of luck or judgment, address or credentials, rank or function—or purely the nature of one's business and the particular character of one's enquiry?

The answer is that it may be any one of these—or perhaps a combination of them. Sometimes an enquiry is translated to a higher level by the merest chance: it has been addressed in such a way as to get into a senior officer's in-tray; or a proposed reply goes to him for signature in the absence of the junior officer who would normally have signed it; or a person waiting about in a corridor for an interview is bumped into by a senior official, who sees that he is looked after and gives his particular case just sufficient impetus to ensure that it is not stuck in the

machine. Sometimes a casual introduction from an official in another department or a covering letter from an employer, a Town Clerk or the secretary of some outside body, will achieve the same effect.

More often, however, the case will be promoted because of something about it, or the person to whom it relates, that the junior civil servant recognises as potentially troublesome. It may be the way the person concerned writes his letter, it may be his rank or status, or that of the person to whom the case relates, it may be some invincible proof of complexity or urgency, or merely the resemblance the case bears to some other that has caused difficulty, that triggers off the action which removes the case from the ruck and gets it up to administrative, or near administrative, level. The extent to which cases are 'referred up' varies, of course, from office to office and from branch to branch. So does the need for dealing with exceptional cases in this way, and so do the methods of selection.

There are so many variables, then, that it is almost impossible to describe the processes by which correspondence at the semi-official level is initiated. In some offices the nature of the contacts with other departments and with Local Authorities and other bodies and persons outside the service, or the volume of the work or the way it is organised or the 'touchiness' of its subject matter, makes it necessary for a great deal to be done in this way. In other departments the tradition of dealing with everything on a strictly official basis is preserved, with scarcely any exceptions. There is really no rule about this. A great deal depends on individuals and on the traditions they inherit within various branches of the service. In general, however, it is fair to say that where there is, for one reason or another, a large administrative top-structure, a great deal of informal and semi-official correspondence generally takes place, and that in the sectors where the more senior executives are in control there is, as a general rule, greater formality. On average the executives have, as we have seen, spent longer under the influence of the service atmosphere and are less likely to make allowances for 'amateurs' outside the service or to have quite such close

links with the managing and directing groups in industry and commerce or in the professions. Their eyes are, generally speaking, turned inwards towards the interior workings of the Department, and, unlike the administrators, they do not generally feel it any part of their function to keep an eye on currents of opinion in the world outside the service.

It must not be thought that there is anything sinister about this tendency to treat correspondence at two or more levels, or that it is a question, for instance, of one law for the rich and another for the poor. It is sometimes, of course, a case of one answer for the inarticulate and uninstructed and another, softer, answer for the resourceful and the knowledgeable. To the ordinary run of the mill letter the reply may be 'No', or more likely, 'The answer is in the negative'; whereas to an enquiry which is dealt with at a higher level, the answer to the same question may be, 'Well, no, but why not try to do what you want in such and such a way?' It is generally a matter of spending a little more time and imagination on a case, seeing whether there is perhaps some indirect way of doing what is wanted (or an expert at the right level in another office who can profitably be consulted) or perhaps looking again at the rule which is obstructing progress and seeing whether it cannot be waived in this and similar cases.

In a perfect civil service, serving a perfect community, this kind of thing would be neither necessary nor possible. In a mercenary bureaucracy, serving a corrupt people, the subtler and more helpful answers would be available only to those who could pay for them. In our own service, access to men who are able to give sympathetic, considered and fully authoritative answers depends on a number of factors. It is, perhaps, less the language one uses or the heading of one's notepaper, than the merits of one's case or its sheer complexity that can secure attention at the highest level; and, in one way or another, even the most ordinary people can sometimes enlist extremely powerful advocates. But the fact remains that there are side doors and back doors, as well as the front door to which the general public are usually directed, and that, in the last resort, these extremes sometimes

—though by no means always—accelerate or facilitate the dealings of those who are able to use them.

Having said this, it is only fair to add that, while the service is as large, its work as complex and spread-eagled and its staff as stratified as at present, this lack of uniformity of approach, if not of decision, is bound to persist. To eradicate it entirely one would have to abolish human prejudice and vastly enlarge the bounds of human sympathy and understanding; and one would have at the same time to halt and turn back all those familiar and natural emotions that make men and women desire to be well thought of by those about them and encourage them to acquire the outlook and adopt the colouring of the social group within which they move, or have moved in their formative years. And one would also have to spend a great deal more money and manpower to ensure, while securing uniformity, that the specially considerate treatment which is at present accorded to a minority of cases, and frequently serves in the long run to set the tone, did not vanish altogether from the face of the service.

But it is obviously desirable that the best standards should spread as far as possible and should pervade the service, that there should be a less great disparity, shall we say, between the quantity and quality of the thought that is given to an informal letter which is written from a children's officer, or a Bishop, to a senior civil servant and that bestowed by a clerical officer on a garbled note from an old age pensioner. Sometimes, of course, the pensioner already gets just as much consideration as the Local Government Officer or the churchman, but this is not and cannot be the rule. The most one can reasonably ask for, in the conditions that official flesh is heir to, is that the disparity should be narrowed and that matters of vital importance to the people concerned should, as time goes on, be referred more quickly, and with greater certainty, to a level at which they can be sympathetically and positively dealt with.

The service is not yet very good at this. Traditionally, its functions have been defensive and regulatory and its

muscles have been developed accordingly. It is used to dealing with people outside it and ranged in ordered tiers about its periphery. But now its functions have spread so far and the lives of the people it has to deal with are so complicated and their representatives, official and unofficial, so many and various, that many of them seem to be inside it, mixed up, as it were, with the workings of the machine. And even those who are outside do not always behave predictably or fall into easily recognisable groups. A great many people in the service are accordingly still feeling their way towards what they hope will be a proper set of relationships. Their standards of behaviour towards people outside the service may have been formed in the days between the wars, or acquired more recently at school or university or in the forces. In either case they are not likely, as yet, to know all the answers to present problems. The more junior officers, on the other hand, do not generally quite know what their supervisors require of them, and the supervisors themselves are still in the process of learning the new tasks, involving management of men and contact with people on a much greater scale than was formerly the case. There is too much going on in and about the service for it to be an ivory tower for anyone; but new men, of broader background and experience, new methods and new forms of organisation, involving much shorter lines of command and much more direct control of staff, are only just beginning to find their place within the service.

Meanwhile, there are, as we have seen, numerous watch-dogs outside intent on seeing that equitable, uniform and reasonable answers are given to questions asked, and that money is spent at the right time, in the right place and on the right sort of people. We have considered the contribution of Parliament to this task and we have seen some of the ways in which other bodies and persons are able to take up matters with Ministers and their Departments. It is obviously equally possible for other outside bodies and persons to gain access to their opposite numbers within the service. A County Treasurer, for instance, a Town Clerk or the secretary to a large company will probably have

an acquaintance or two at assistant secretary or principal level in the Department or Departments with which he is most closely concerned. There will be someone he has met at an interview, talked to over the telephone or possibly served with on a committee. And most members of the professional and managerial classes will know someone whom they can address as 'Dear Mr. Smith' or ask over the phone to do them the kindness of putting them in touch with the right official or the right branch to consider some matter they have in hand.

These arrangements are of course informal and, except in the case of some of the larger trade associations and trade unions, quite unorganised on both sides. But there is one class of contacts with the outside world which the service now takes very good care to organise. This concerns the relations between the Departments and the press and other media of mass publicity.

Almost all Government offices nowadays have Public Relations Officers or can make use of the services of those of other departments; and in the larger departments the P.R.O., who is supposed to have his finger on all matters likely to affect the Department's good name and its relations with the man in the street, usually has under him Press Officers, generally journalists or former journalists, who deal directly with the press and talk to editors and reporters, or do their best to, in their own language.

There have been occasions when it has appeared that these arrangements were working badly and that the Public Relations or Information Officers and their staffs were being used merely as a barrier between the press and the workaday civil servants engaged in specific tasks in which the public might be interested, or were acting merely as propagandists for their Ministers. But this is not the general verdict. Discreet expert advice on publicity and public relations has often served in a modest way to get difficult things done well—the issue of new ration books, for instance, or the taking of a census; and it can sometimes save a great deal of time and money by persuading people with the aid of the press and radio to do for themselves things that

some minor official would otherwise have to be paid to do. The Information Officers also provide a focal point for outside enquiries and help to get people useful answers at little cost in official time. A good Information Officer will also act as a conductor, not as an insulator, of opinions.

Having engaged these specialists, most departments would wish for nothing better than to be able to conduct all their business with the press and with the world of entertainment, publicity and advertising through them. But this is seldom possible. Press men naturally like to know what lies behind official hand-outs and, by astute use of the telephone and by sheer persistence, they frequently extract information direct from civil servants concerned with matters in which the newspapers are currently interested. And editors, for their part, will frequently run stories about the doings of Departments or individual civil servants without consulting the Information Officer, or anyone else in the Department. Civil servants, for the most part, understand the reasons for this quite well, and they know that their duties are such that the glare of publicity may at any moment be focused upon them. Few of them welcome the prospect, and they generally do their utmost to avoid it. But they are aware that no amount of care or ingenuity can preclude the possibility that some unconsidered act of theirs may provide a reporter with a story or a sub-editor with a headline.

How this affects their daily doings it is hard to say. The press man would assert, doubtless with some truth, that it makes them scrupulous. It certainly makes some of them nervous—particularly as they know very well that there is no real defence against press criticism, even where it happens to be exaggerated or misconceived. No official denial or Ministerial representation can undo the harm that criticism in the national press has done to a branch or a department. Their only solace is that journalistic storms are mercifully short-lived, and that official shortcomings which make the headlines one day may be found scarcely to deserve mention on page three the next. For civil servants, as for other figures in the public eye, there is a certain safety in numbers.

CHAPTER VIII

The Unorganised Public

We have seen how civil servants have been recruited, deployed, conditioned, what attitudes and characteristics may fairly be said to be prevalent among them and the nature of their relations with lawyers, politicians, journalists and others by whom they are influenced and through whom they are able, in many cases, to make known the nature of their wishes to 'that timid, staring creature man'. It remains to discover what happens when the civil servant and the public meet each other face to face.

One stumbles, with this phrase, upon an initial difficulty: for civil servants seldom do meet the public, in any sense, face to face. The man who gives the orders is rarely able to put himself precisely in the place of those who must obey. The citizen with a problem can scarcely ever explain it, in terms which both understand, to the official who has it in his power to solve it. This is not a new situation or one that is peculiar to public administration; but we have found, in studying the civil servant, that certain official traits clearly aggravate it. It is time to enquire whether there is anything in the make-up of the public, in the tasks which the service now has to perform or in the conditions in which it has to undertake them which contributes to the difficulty.

For this purpose we must begin by trying to form some idea of the general attitude, not only to the civil service, but to the network of statutory and pseudo-statutory obligations which the public service is expected to enforce. And we must enquire not only how far members of the public are willing, but how far they are able, to co-operate with the officials.

The most obvious starting point for an enquiry of this kind is the language which almost all have in common and which all but those in a few Welsh counties must use in their day-to-day dealings with the representatives of the State. Much has been said about the reluctance of officials to use plain words, and this subject will be touched on again later in this chapter, but it should also be realised that the public is, on the whole, even less at home with them. Its social and economic groups are, to adapt Shaw's paradox, divided, rather than united, by the same language. In their ranks—and all must be dealt with at some time or another by public officers—are scholars whose fastidious use of language is at once a weapon and a barrier, business-men who torture and contract words into patterns of their own and simple, scarcely literate people who can only with the greatest difficulty shape a sentence or express themselves verbally at all. Many a heavy official answer or fumbling decision is called into being by a garbled or otherwise unhelpful communication from a member of the public.

It would be invidious to quote examples. Letters from the public are personal and confidential. But whether they are asking for a passport or a tax remission, an improvement grant or a new junior school, they run very much to type. At the bottom of the scale of literary accomplishment, though not always of clarity, is the kind of letter that comes from an elderly man or woman, who may well have left school at thirteen or fourteen and found little use for the written word since. He or she will often begin rather like this:

> Dear Sir,
>
> I wonder if you can help me now as I dont know who else to turn to and have been told as you may. Sir, I know as I done wrong all that time ago . . .

Then will follow a garbled and long-drawn-out account of some youthful peccadillo, missing out most of the vital dates and revealing a situation or a state of mind that it is for the doctor or the welfare worker, rather than the administrator, to attempt to cure. Thousands of letters of this kind arrive in Government Departments every week. Some of

them are painfully stilted—as if their authors had been convinced by long experience of forms and circulars that the language of common speech was not good enough for official occasions. Some include incongruous scraps of home-made jargon:

> . . . hoping you will let me have the same as I need it for going on holiday.
>
> I trust you will find the above to your complete satisfaction.

And they remind one that there is a considerable sector of society that is barely literate and whose members find the use of the written word a perpetual stumbling block. For such people the complexities of modern life, and the demands society makes upon them, are almost always on the point of being too much. Every official contact is a burden, every form a mystery, every departure from the simple routine of living a minor crisis. For them, the strait-jacket of war-time restrictions was least disturbing when it left least room for personal decisions. And now, in peace-time, it is not the even and habitual pressure of the government machine that troubles them, but the odd occasions when it creaks. It is when some official idiosyncrasy or error, or a past act or omission of their own, makes the law inapplicable or scarcely applicable to their case that they are left anxiously wondering what they must do to be safe. They have, as their letters reveal, a firm belief in the essential righteousness of the public service, a conviction, sometimes misplaced, that if only they press the right button they will get the right answer. But they are obviously horrified—as well they may be—by the size and complexity of the machine.

Not all letters from the public are of the kind described above. Many are of course from people who have made the written word their own and are able to meet, and sometimes beat, the official on his own ground. But, even of these, many are quite inadequate. There are angry or contentious letters from people who have clearly enjoyed writing them and are letting off steam. There are ill-informed letters from men and women who have never bothered to look at the

facts or have been baffled by some regulation or official letter. There are hurried letters, dashed off in an odd moment, leaving out salient points and scorning reference numbers. And there are indignant letters from people who have always thought themselves slightly above the law and have just been reminded, perhaps a little heavily, that some exasperating enactment applies to them. Letters of each type flow constantly into the in-trays of civil servants, in numbers which suggest that they represent states of mind that are extremely common among the public.

The angry letters are not always written by people who are irritated by the conduct of a specific case, or even by a series of unfortunate personal encounters with officials. They are very often composed by people who fancy that they have detected a symptom of a general malaise, and that in making their protest they are somehow striking a blow against a clumsy and inefficient system. They believe this, in the main, because they have always been told so, but also because what they have been told seems, every now and then, to be confirmed by personal experience. They are often furious almost before they start. Many of them, if one talks to them privately, will admit this. They are continuously conditioned by the stream of adverse criticism which flows week by week and year by year (and has done so now for the greater part of their adult life) from the press, the cinema and the radio. The plain man sees the civil service through glasses borrowed from the late Tommy Handley, from successive British comedies and from the journalists who prepare his daily paper. Many of his assumptions are hangovers from the war years. Some of them are, as we have seen, quite false. Others are based on all-too-accurate observation. But we are not at present concerned with the validity of these assumptions. It does not matter whether civil servants really drink more tea than journalists, delight in drafting forms, wear bowlers or look like Puffingtons. It is sufficient that the public thinks they do.

Similarly, confusion in the ordinary run of ill-informed letters seldom springs from the inherent difficulty of a particular situation, the defective wording of an Act or the

obscurity of a specific letter received from an official. It arises more often from a feeling in the writer that the whole business of public administration has become rather too muddled and complex for him to bother about. He feels that so many minor obligations to do things and provide information are laid upon him by so many rather inefficient and over-worked officials that it will not really matter very much if he fails to comply with some of them or perform others conscientiously. He has heard so often of red tape and pigeon-holes that he has difficulty in convincing himself that his minute item of information or compliance with some quaintly worded instruction is really necessary—or that an occasional abstention from virtue is likely to be noticed. All too often his scepticism is justified.

Something of this spirit clearly informs many of the hurried and careless letters with which civil servants are constantly being plagued—and which they are bound by habit and tradition to treat with quite unmerited seriousness. But some of the trouble lies deeper, and successive generations of civil servants must shoulder only part of the blame for it. People are hurried and careless in their official dealings, not so much because they have too much to do with the government machine as because they have too much to do in general. This is an age in which the list of competing claims on leisure is constantly increasing. There are more and more things one must do, possess, enjoy, provide for one's family; and the effort of keeping up with the Joneses leaves very little time for various important and quite complicated personal matters. Such things as claiming income tax relief, applying for a pension, proving a will or getting an insurance card stamped have to be fitted into the interstices of life.

Similarly, many of the indignant letters received by public departments come from people who feel themselves slighted, not so much by some action of a known civil servant, as by the general course of events, for which they hold the Government of the day and its paid officials responsible. Britain is not the great power she was. The Danes or the Egyptians make hard conditions. The position of the

middle classes has deteriorated. Servants are expensive and hard to come by. The welfare state has to be paid for. Each of these facts is noted and attributed, at least in part, to officialdom; and the luckless bureaucrat whose innocuous, if rather wooden, reply might have been disregarded before the war finds himself angrily assailed. The vexations of living in a nervous, crowded and restless society, which no longer appears quite sure where it is going, very naturally express themselves in unprovoked attacks on civil servants.

The position is made more difficult by the fact that the service is much bigger than it was in 1939 and that many of the new tasks which it took up during the war and is still in the process of shedding are closely associated in the public mind with the administrative improvisations and quite exceptional restrictions and privations of wartime. Nor have civil servants been helped by the fact that they have been involved in a general move away from *laissez-faire* and in the still-unresolved disputes as to the merits of State intervention in various social and economic matters. This is not the place to discuss in detail the extent and significance of the expansion that has taken place, but it may be useful to mention some of the more important changes, if only to show how the newly-acquired tasks have, in some cases, brought civil servants into closer contact than before with the unorganised public.

A rough-and-ready indication of the changes that have taken place can be obtained by comparing a pre-war edition of the Imperial Calendar with its somewhat stouter present-day counterpart. Glancing through this publication, which lists all officials of higher executive officer rank and over, one finds that a great many of the new tasks have been imposed by the war and continued by the cold war. The Ministry of Supply, with its hundreds of administrative and executive officers, was a war-time creation. The Ministry of Defence is new, the service departments are larger than they were and the Ministry of Labour has a new name and new functions connected with the call up. Other changes have been brought about by the economic climate; still others are due to nationalisation, and perhaps the most

interesting from the viewpoint of the present discussion are those attributable, broadly speaking, to the development of the welfare state. In this sector, which includes the Ministry of Pensions and National Insurance, parts of the Ministry of Health, the National Assistance Board and the Children's Branch of the Home Office, as well as parts of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour, the service is to some extent breaking new ground, not only by undertaking certain new tasks, but by performing them in a new atmosphere and with a new attitude. Many of these tasks were being performed before the war, either on the fringes of the service or within it, but in most cases there were barriers and intermediaries between the Departments concerned and the people whose affairs were being dealt with; often there still are. But sometimes, as with the Ministry of Pensions and National Insurance and the Assistance Board, it has been found necessary to send officials out into the provinces to deal with the public face to face, in fields which were formerly the preserves of the Local Authorities and the voluntary societies. Thus, to the older Departments like the Customs, for instance, and the Post Office, which have long been used to dealing with the public in a regulatory or more or less mechanical way, there are now added departments committed to dealing with some of its most urgent personal needs with some measure of understanding, imagination and sympathy.

These additions have had an effect in departments outside the social service sector. Not only have the moneys defrayed and the documentation and claims to benefit incidental to the welfare services had an impact on the work of such offices as the Charity Commission and the General Register Office, but the welfare of National Servicemen and of members of the forces and their families overseas poses awkward problems for the service departments and the collection and compilation of statistics relevant to all these matters provide more work and raises new difficulties. All these interlocking activities of the public service make great demands of sympathy and imagination on civil servants in many departments, and the problem of getting

the right kind of response from the public runs right across the field. Precise points of legal and historical background differ, but the people who raise the greatest problems for one department are often those with whom other civil servants have had difficulty and, on the whole, the methods adopted for dealing with them are not dissimilar. Paradoxically, as we shall see, the structure of the welfare state itself creates new difficulties. The more welfare, the more welfare workers, the more workers the more necessity for consultation, the greater the risk of duplication, the more rules and regulations and the more complex and difficult the business of administration.

Let us, by following the progress of a single letter from a member of the unorganised public through one of the social service Ministries, see how the civil service struggles with difficulties of this kind. We will imagine that the writer, a Mr. Smith, has had a brush with a Local Authority about its unwillingness to grant some welfare or educational benefit or other in respect of his child. He writes to the Ministry about it, posting his letter, shall we say, in time to catch the Sunday afternoon collection. It will arrive, with a hundred others, on Monday morning, and be opened by a clerical officer, who, because of the nature of his work, is required to arrive at the office in advance of his fellows. His main task is to make sure that any remittance said to be enclosed is enclosed and that any document sent is properly looked after. He will have cleared the morning post by nine-thirty, at the latest, and Mr. Smith's letter will be taken by a messenger to the Registry, a place we have heard about in an earlier chapter. In the Registry, it will be sorted into a pile of correspondence dealing with the same subject, or perhaps the same area, and given to another clerical officer. He or she will make sure, or try to, that the letter is not, in fact, in continuation of earlier correspondence, take a note of it, file it in a jacket and mark it to yet another clerical officer, in the section of the office which seems likely to have to deal with it. He or she will usually guess right about this—and will be helped if Mr. Smith was not too nettled to compose a coherent letter.

The registry clerk who does these things may, if Mr. Smith is lucky, do them all right away. But it is quite likely that he will not. Perhaps the letter will be at the bottom of the pile and not be reached until after lunch. Or, if the Registry has a back-log of work, or it is the leave season, or somebody has 'flu, it may be Tuesday morning before Mr. Smith's letter is reached and taken, again by messenger, to the section, probably on another floor, possibly in another building, in which it will be dealt with. The clerk concerned, in this section, may also, if Mr. Smith is lucky, seize upon the letter and read it the moment it drops into his in-tray. But this is, on the whole, unlikely. Clerical officers in large departments do not often sit about waiting for work to arrive. It would be grossly uneconomic if they did. It is very likely that the officer concerned will have other files, some of them marked urgent, to deal with and that Mr. Smith's letter will not be reached until Tuesday afternoon. It may even have to wait until Wednesday morning. It is not difficult to imagine that in a bad office a letter of this kind may have to wait a week or more, at certain times and seasons, before anyone begins to deal with it.

Let us imagine, however, that Mr. Smith's luck holds and that the clerical officer takes his letter out of the tray and reads it early on Tuesday afternoon. He will probably, if he is a bright and efficient fellow, begin by writing a post-card acknowledgment to Mr. Smith. This will be written in manuscript and will probably reach its destination some time on Wednesday. Acknowledgments are not always sent. Practice varies from office to office, and from branch to branch. But, where there has to be consultation with a third party and there is some possibility of delay, one will usually be sent.

If Mr. Smith's clerical officer is, as we have suggested, an efficient fellow, he will probably draft a letter to the Local Authority enclosing a copy of Mr. Smith's letter and asking for the authority's comments. He may use a stock draft, or even a form, for this, or he may perhaps add a paragraph of his own, drawing attention to a specific point or asking a particular question. It is unlikely that he will

do more than this—and he may well do less. If he is congenitally cautious, or crusty, or merely new to this particular work, he may be content to mark the file on to his superior, with some such comment as:

Mr. Potts,
To see lttr. of 13th Aprl. pl.

Mr. Potts will almost certainly be a junior executive officer, one of the range of people we have discussed in some detail earlier. He may be a boy straight from a secondary school, or an older man who entered the service as a clerical officer many years ago and has only recently obtained promotion. There is not much chance, in a case of the kind we are considering, that he will do more than check his subordinate's draft and amend it as he thinks fit or provide a broadly similar one of his own. He is not, generally speaking, expected to do more at this stage. There is just an outside chance that he will be an expert in this particular field and be constrained to ring up the Local Authority and try to get the facts straight and the problem settled on the spot. But his superiors would probably be rather surprised, and mildly alarmed, if he did—and he would run some risk of getting a dusty answer from the Local Authority.

It is far more likely that Mr. Smith's file will go straight from Mr. Potts to the typing pool, where it will probably receive attention within the first forty-eight hours, perhaps a little less, perhaps a little more. Shortly after the war, various factors combined to produce an acute shortage of typists in Whitehall, and, even now, a 'flu epidemic may play havoc with the typing in a particular office and certain departments regularly have to send their letters to the provinces to be typed. But nowadays forty-eight hours is probably not a bad estimate.

By now it will be a week or so since Mr. Smith dropped his letter, perhaps a little angrily, into the pillar box. He may, as we have seen, have had a bare acknowledgment. He may not. In any case he may perhaps think that a reminder is called for. He will sit down, possibly on Sunday afternoon, to compose one. But he would do well to have a care, for

the effect of a reminder on a Government office is almost unpredictable, and there is a tale, doubtless apocryphal, about a man who permanently evaded deportation by sending to the Home Office a stream of well-timed reminders which had the effect of removing his file from the top of the pile whenever it was just about to be dealt with!

We will assume, however, that in Mr. Smith's case the worst does not happen, and that his reminder, when it arrives, does not cause his file to be taken out of the typing pool, glanced at by Mr. Potts and returned to the pool, thus occasioning a further delay. We will assume, on the other hand, that the best does not happen, and that the reminder contains no word or phrase that catches Mr. Potts' imagination and causes him to deal with the case exceptionally. Reminders do sometimes have this effect, but less often than one might suppose.

After all, what could Mr. Potts, or his supervisor, Miss Carter, do about it, however well disposed? The situation is one that repeats itself time and again in the social service sector of public administration. There is perhaps some dispute about the facts, or the case is a marginal one. Some outside body, often a Local Authority, has some status in the matter, must be consulted and, unless some inescapable point of law is taken against it, is likely to have the last word. Its powers may well be defined by statute, and the Minister's grounds for intervention limited, his general responsibility under the Act reassuring on paper but difficult to discharge in practice. The Authority cannot be rushed or bludgeoned, and if there is any attempt to do this the officers dealing with the case locally will probably stiffen and suppress any temptation to give the person concerned the benefit of any doubt that may exist. This is not to fasten blame on persons outside the service, or to comment on the efficiency of Local Government, which is sometimes greater, sometimes less, than that of Central Government. It is merely to point out that a two- or three-tier system creates problems as well as solving them.

We shall probably find, then, that unless Miss Carter, who will be a higher executive officer, is a person of

unusual tenacity or strength of character, or happens to have the ear of someone in the local office, she will let the letter to the Local Authority go as drafted. She may sign it herself, or Mr. Potts, the executive officer, may sign it. Practice varies from office to office and from time to time.

If Mr. Smith is fortunate, the Local Authority may reply to the Ministry within a week. Some authorities are very good at this sort of thing, some are not. The same applies to the many other local bodies and persons whom civil servants—those who wish to pass the buck or confuse the responsibility and those who do not—are bound, as things stand, to consult in very many cases before taking their decisions. So it may take longer, and if it does there is not very much the Ministry can do about it, except send reminders, unless Mr. Potts or Miss Carter cares to have a word over the telephone about it. When the Authority's observations are in fact received they may show that the whole matter has already been carefully investigated locally and that Mr. Smith has really not a leg to stand on. They may disclose on the other hand, though this is unlikely, that the Authority has capitulated. In either case, Mr. Potts, unless he is a quite untypical executive officer, will probably not be displeased. He will be in a position to give a final answer, knock the case on the head and put the file away. If the reply can be favourable so much the better, but if not there will be a certain satisfaction in quoting chapter and verse to Mr. Smith, showing him precisely where he is wrong and telling him exactly why he cannot have what he wants. This will be so, not because Mr. Potts is naturally vicious or inhuman, but because he has perhaps spent some time playing this particular game and derives some satisfaction from rounding off an encounter neatly and demonstrating his mastery of the finer points. Thus, if the Authority's letter makes it possible to give Mr. Smith a clear-cut answer Mr. Potts' draft will be turned into an official letter quite quickly, Miss Carter will sign it and Mr. Smith will get it, though perhaps not the grant he was asking for, within about three weeks of writing his original letter.

If, on the other hand, the Authority's reply seems inconclusive or evasive, or Mr. Smith appears to have been turned down on wrong grounds, Mr. Potts will probably write a minute to Miss Carter telling her why he thinks so. This minute, which will be in manuscript, will probably not be written as Mr. Potts would write or speak if dealing with a friend or with some informal affair of his own. It may well be written in officialese, somewhat like this:

> MISS CARTER,
>
> The Authy. have now replied to the O.L. of 22nd Aprl. In this connexion you will observe that they quote in their second para. Circular 1056 of 1952. Presumably, in the light of Legal's min. of 19th June 1953, however, the above does not cover section 51 cases or children under 11+. In all the circs. I presume we will wish to reply to writer as on file 16543 B attd.
>
> E. P.

It will be written in this rather odd way because Mr. Potts has inherited this method of communication from his predecessors and finds that it seems to suit Miss Carter quite well and to be in accordance with the practice of his colleagues. They have all heard of *Plain Words* of course and they do what they conveniently can to make their letters intelligible to the public, without interfering too much with the pale cast of official thought. But, as between colleagues, they are quite content with jargon, short cuts, abbreviations and threadbare phrases. If asked about it they would probably say that it saves time, and if one went on to enquire whether something of this habitual style of writing did not spill over into their letters to the public they would perhaps deny it. But there is little doubt that this does happen.

When a letter from a member of the public reaches a higher executive officer for consideration, it reaches a turning point. It is almost certainly not a routine case. It will probably require careful attention—the ransacking of the precedent book possibly to find a decision on a similar point. It may necessitate consultation with people outside the section, or even outside the office, the

relaxing of a general rule, the exercise of discretion or the devising of an alternative approach to a problem which, as posed, seems incapable of satisfactory solution. A great deal depends, so far as the individual applicant is concerned, on Miss Carter and people like her. Does she know her job thoroughly, or is she still feeling her way? Is she really up to it mentally, or is she someone who was promoted because she was on the spot when things were expanding during the war? Does she like people, or has constant rubbing against them and their perpetual queries caused her to view them with a faint suspicion and a mild distaste? Does she like a quiet life—or know, perhaps, that her principal or senior executive officer dislikes being bothered? Has she acquired a technique for getting things done for people without a lot of bother, and does she rather fancy her hand at it? Can she put herself in Mr. Smith's place?

We have seen how people become higher executive officers and what sort of people they tend to be; and we know enough about the wide range of experience and ability within the grade to understand that no firm answer to the questions asked in the last paragraph can be given. Mr. Smith may be fortunate enough to find in Miss Carter a person of imagination and energy, capable of taking charge of his case and bringing it to a swift and satisfactory conclusion. He may, equally, find in her someone who does nothing to advance matters, but merely holds up the file for a day or two before passing it, with some lukewarm recommendation, to her principal or senior executive officer.

We will assume that Mr. Smith's case is not by any means a simple one. Some awkward point of law or practice is involved, and the Local Authority's reply is not, on the face of it, satisfactory. If Miss Carter is a really good officer she may carry enough guns to settle an awkward problem of this kind more or less on her own responsibility, deciding in her own mind what additional information is needed, getting it from Mr. Smith, the Local Authority, or from a departmental inspector, suggesting to the Authority, if it appears to be in the wrong, that it might be better to give

way gracefully, or explaining things tactfully to Mr. Smith if it appears to be in the right. All this will need a certain touch, an ability to be firm where necessary, a willingness to take trouble and a knowledge that one will be backed up if one takes a slight risk or departs from the protocol somewhat in the interests of equity and common sense. These assets are not common in the middle and lower ranks of large organisations, and if Miss Carter happens to possess them all she will belong to the minority rather than the majority of officers of her grade. But, for reasons which we have seen, it is a growing minority.

If Miss Carter finds that Mr. Smith's case is beyond her she may minute it to her superior or she may speak to him. Her choice of method will depend on the custom of the office, the nature of the case and, to some extent, on personal idiosyncrasy. Before the war minute writing was rather the thing, but nowadays long minutes are frowned on in many offices and it would be rare for an officer of Miss Carter's grade not to feel free to approach her principal or senior executive officer with a view to having a word about a case if she wished to do so. In the case we are considering she may well compromise by setting out a few important points and asking for an opportunity to talk the matter over.

The principal or senior executive officer to whom this reference is made will usually be the head of a section or branch. He will be, as nearly as anyone ever is in the civil service, a manager. He will be responsible in a broad sense for what happens in his branch, and if there is to be a change of direction, or if discretion is to be exercised or some concession extracted from another branch or department he will generally have to be brought into the picture. We have remarked in an earlier chapter that his position is not unlike that of the captain of a man-o'-war. He is a man under authority—sometimes closely, sometimes loosely, exercised—and he has his sailing orders. As regards what is done within the branch he is responsible, but even in this respect he must abide by regulations laid down for him as to the use and deployment of staff, in whose appointment

and removal he has little say. Furthermore, he depends on other branches for various services such as typing, the receipt and despatch of correspondence and the provision of accommodation, furniture and equipment.

We have seen that there is no standard practice in the service and that the reference from a higher executive officer is sometimes to a senior executive officer, or perhaps a chief executive officer, and sometimes to a principal. Much depends on the nature of the work, much on the traditional organisation of the office. We see now, with our awkward case poised on the point of decision, how much may depend on this. A great deal will turn on the character of the man to whom references of this kind are made and on the degree of freedom he himself enjoys. Most of the cases that reach this level in the social services sector of the administrative machine will involve an application or protest made by some 'awkward' individual—'awkward' in the sense that he, or some member of his family, does not fit neatly into the general pattern or because of some difficulty of character or circumstance, or possibly in the sense that his case raises some difficult point of law or runs him foul of two conflicting authorities.

If the man at this point in the chain has the qualities that we have noticed as being common among the older and more senior executives: caution, steadiness, reliability, strict regard for precedent and a tendency to stick to his sectional or departmental last, it will probably not be a very bright outlook for Mr. Smith. An officer of this kind will see that what is strictly necessary is done, soberly and with some dignity; but he will not go crusading or wage a campaign on someone else's territory on behalf of an unknown individual. If the Authority is breaking the letter of the law, or, still worse in his eyes, flouting some departmental instruction or circular, he will come down ponderously on Mr. Smith's side. But if unusual sympathy or imagination is needed he may be found wanting, and if the scales are evenly weighed, his prejudices will probably tip them on the side of inaction as against experiment, in favour of the Authority as against the individual.

If, on the other hand, Miss Carter's boss happens to be a principal, Mr Smith faces a much wider range of possibilities. It is possible of course that the principal may be merely an executive in administrative clothing, a decent old chap, formerly a senior executive officer, who came across to the administrative ranks during, or shortly after, the war. If so, his official philosophy is unlikely to be sharply distinguishable from that of many of the executives. Statistically, the chances are high that Mr. Smith's case will be dealt with by a man of this stamp.

A second possibility is that our man may be an Arts graduate of one of the older universities who entered by open examination before the war and has been prevented, perhaps by bad luck, perhaps by some psychological difficulty, from getting any further. It is almost impossible to predict the fate of Mr. Smith's case in his hands. It will certainly have an excellent brain applied to it, and it is quite possible that Mr. Smith will find his cause championed by someone who is well able to understand his position and has sufficient self-confidence to persuade the Local Authority to retreat from a doubtful position—or perhaps to stretch a point in Mr. Smith's favour. It is quite possible, on the other hand, that Mr. Smith will find himself turned down on some obscure point of law or on some principle which neither he—nor for that matter Miss Carter—is capable of grasping. Principals of this type, sitting often a little out of touch with their underlings and essaying pure administration on various philosophical premises of their own, are likely to seem uncertain performers to the public—if only because they cannot always make their writ run consistently among their subordinates.

The Civil Service Commissioners have, as we have seen, recognised this difficulty, which flows partly from pre-war methods of recruitment and training, and have tried to circumvent it by a number of innovations. One of these is the selection of a proportion of administrative officers by a method involving a series of extended interviews and tests of personal qualities, as well as a written examination and an appearance before a final selection board. It may well

be, therefore, that Mr. Smith's case will be finally settled by a principal of this type, a product of the Stoke D'Abernon system. If so, he will most likely be a man with a good second, who had his baptism of administrative fire during the war, probably as a junior officer in the forces. On the other hand, it is just possible that he will be a former executive of about the same age who has been caught early and passed through the Stoke D'Abernon sieve. In either case he ought, in theory, to be a man of some energy and resource, a good cross, as it were, between the severely practical and cautious senior executive type and the brilliant, if sometimes faintly other-worldly, pre-war academic entrant. He ought, too, to have the resilience and flexibility which we have seen to be needed in dealing with difficult individual cases within the framework of the civil service system. He is, of course, the product of a new method, and so still on trial. But let us, in this instance, assume that he does all that is required of him, dealing faithfully with Mr. Smith and the Local Authority, and pass on, first according him our congratulations—and perhaps our sympathy. He will need the latter, for there are many Mr. Smiths and the pitfalls into which they and theirs may stumble—or be pushed—are legion!

We have seen that it took some three or four weeks for Mr. Smith's letter to reach a man who could finally dispose of it. And this is not, of course, the end of the matter. It may take the principal or senior executive officer days or weeks to get the action taken that he thinks the case deserves. More letters may have to be written, more questions asked, more people consulted—and all this in a good Ministry where everyone does more or less what is expected of him. The possibility of delay in a case where someone in the chain of command is clearly inefficient or where someone at the local end goes to sleep are obviously enormous. We are not concerned here with such cases, which usually attract the attention of a Member of Parliament or the press, but with those which are conscientiously dealt with, in an office that is working well by civil service standards. Nor have we assumed that Mr. Smith's case is one of the tiny proportion of chronic and fantastically

complex problems which form the administrative equivalent of a House of Lords case. We have merely taken it to be one that is sufficiently delicate and out of the common run to make it worth while to have it dealt with at or near administrative level.

It is obvious that in so large a machine as the civil service, and in particular in those parts of it which are comparatively new and which are closely concerned with individuals, there must be very many cases broadly comparable in difficulty to that of Mr. Smith. And it is equally obvious that no one who knows much about the machine is likely to be quite satisfied with it. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that, at both ends, within the service and among the special groups who have been brought into close touch with it, there have been attempts to oil the machine and make it a little less stiff and cumbersome.

One of these is, of course, the local office, such as is provided by the Ministry of Pensions and National Insurance, where people may go and explain their problems personally to an officer who, even if he cannot deal with them on the spot, can at least take particulars and obtain an answer, which can, if need be, be passed on to the person concerned at a subsequent interview. These offices are an unmixed blessing to people, many of them elderly and ill-educated, for whom filling in forms and understanding Acts and regulations is almost impossible. They manage things which could never have been done by way of correspondence with an office in London. They help people over real obstacles and dispel fears about imaginary ones. They detect minor frauds and uncover hidden motives which, if left undetected, might cause the people concerned, their children, or the community a great deal of trouble later on. They prevent people from perjuring themselves—no ill turn; and they work closely with voluntary bodies and the Local Authorities in dealing with those innumerable 'hard cases' which, if they make bad law, go a long way towards providing the bread and butter not only of the lawyers but of an increasing number of administrators. We have discussed earlier the usefulness of the many intermediaries who soften the relations between

the civil service and the public—even if they now and then confuse them! These local officers of the various Ministries are also intermediaries, but with the difference that they usually have executive and sometimes have quasi-judicial functions. They make payments and take decisions, and their task of greasing the wheels and providing a point of contact is largely incidental to these other duties.

Officers engaged in these duties acquire perforce the art, or craft, of interviewing, which is something that in this part of the service, cannot be done properly by immature people. If one is talking, shall we say, to the self-proclaimed widow of a man who is alleged to have gone through two or three forms of marriage with different women, all still living, one needs one's wits about one. One learns to judge character and to begin to know what may and what may not be expected of people. For this reason, a local office, properly used, can be a valuable training ground. The addition of these offices, dealing, not as the Post Office has always done, with a mass of routine matters but with larger and more difficult issues, will eventually provide the service with a reservoir of staff at the clerical and executive levels who are used to meeting the public face to face in this way; and this can scarcely fail to have a useful effect generally. Even if a man is sitting in a Whitehall office drafting regulations and has no immediate dealings with the public, he will be all the better for having had, at some earlier point in his career, the kind of close contact that will help him to appreciate just what they will, and will not, stand, and what can, and what cannot, be expected of them.

For these and other reasons, it is not uncommon for heads of branches nowadays to promote the use of interviews where correspondence might formerly have been thought sufficient. We have already seen how various voluntary agencies fit into this picture; and in those offices which have local representatives and inspectors there is a tendency to ask them to say things which could not quickly or conveniently be put on paper and to ask questions which could not readily be asked in writing. There is also a tendency to try to settle awkward cases or clear the minds of people

befuddled by protracted correspondence by asking them, in cases where this seems likely to be convenient, to come in and talk the matter over. By these devices it is sometimes possible to get away from the tradition of indirectness and to simplify the appearance of the government machine, or cure some of its defects. It is also possible sometimes to correct a false impression in this way without embarrassment to the writer of an earlier letter, to convey unwelcome decisions graciously or to shorten the interval between the beginning and end of a case which sometimes, apart from being extremely irritating to the public, may well be demoralising to the officers dealing with it.

If it is to do these things, or some of them, it is usually of importance that the interview should be what might be called an open one. If it is a closed interview, the precise conclusion of which is known in advance, used merely as a means of placating or fobbing off the public, it is likely to be bad for both sides. But if interviewing is done carefully and with imagination by an officer who asks himself in the first place, 'How can I get this fellow to tell me what he wants or what his trouble is'. And, when he has, 'Can I help him myself, or, if not, put him in touch at once with someone who can?', it has obvious uses as a piece of training and as a generator of goodwill which may be out of all proportion to its immediate usefulness to the person concerned. Someone who has received a helpful answer at a well-conducted interview will usually be more satisfied than if it had been obtained by correspondence. He will feel that he has had personal attention, that the mind of an official has dwelt upon his case. And he will quite possibly prove an easier person to deal with in his next bout with officialdom.

Moreover, as we have hinted, the interview can achieve things that could not be done at all without it. A great deal more can be learned about a man and his problems in the course of a short interview than could be learned by a great deal of correspondence. One gets the feel of him, so to speak, learns what is worrying him, or how far he will go; and one realises in an amazingly high proportion of cases that what is really on his mind is not the problem

he mentioned on paper or the one he referred to when he first entered the room. Civil servants have to deal, nowadays, with an increasing number of people for whom the strain of modern life is very considerable—people on the delinquent fringe of society perhaps—who find it extremely difficult, with the best will in the world, to tell all the people the whole truth all the time. A man of this type, whose letters appear unaccountably rude or misleading, may well turn out, on being interviewed, to be trying to conceal an old prison sentence, or some other collision with the law. A widow, who has told a pack of lies and whose application for some benefit is about to be turned down, may yield up to a skilled interviewer the fact that she has been trying to protect the reputation of her dead husband, who changed his name, because he was a deserter, during the First World War. A woman who has forged a child's birth certificate may confess that she did so because she was terrified by the thought of having to admit to the child that it was not her own.

It works the other way, too. An apparently innocent application may turn out to conceal an elaborate attempt to defraud. A stiff round of questioning may confuse a couple with a well-thought-out story. An incautious word may slip out at the last moment. Many a minor fraud has been snuffed out in this way, the official concerned suggesting, perhaps, that a certain line of enquiry might prove interesting and the applicant hurriedly expressing his reluctance to put the office to further trouble. It is often possible to save a great deal of public time and money—and sometimes, in the long run, much hardship—by conveying to a man that one does not believe him, without saying so on paper.

One would like to be able to say that the interview was universally popular throughout the civil service. But this is not the case. Interviews take time; they are, *prima facie*, great consumers of man-hours. They necessitate thought; and, in what we have called the open interview, quite uncommon powers of imagination and a capacity for taking prompt decisions are called for. Interviews are also, from the point of view of the Department, potentially dangerous.

There is always the chance that the clerical officers and executive officers to whom the task usually falls may say something that will seriously embarrass the Minister. And few officers are quite as firm in withstanding emotional but unfounded appeals made orally as they would be in dealing with the same case by way of correspondence.

For these reasons there is in some departments a marked tendency to discourage the open interview in favour of the closed one, in which it is the officer's duty to ask himself in effect, 'How soon can I send this person about his business, and how little can I give away in the process?' One still occasionally meets a case where someone whose affairs are so tangled as to be almost incomprehensible, or who can scarcely read and write, has been sent away with a form or an injunction to 'write in about it', only to be asked at some later stage to return for an interview with a senior and perhaps more imaginative official. Nevertheless, it is fairly clear that the use of the interview, though meeting with sporadic opposition here and there, is now on the increase throughout the service.

Another device for using the spoken word to rescue public business from the shallows and disappointments of correspondence is the use of the telephone. Here again, there are obvious possibilities, and here again there are dangers and reluctances. We have seen how useful it might have been in Mr. Smith's case if the executive or higher executive officer concerned had been capable of reconnoitring or possibly forcing a decision over the telephone. How pleasantly surprised Mr. Smith would have been if a friendly and informal voice had told him over the telephone on, say, the Tuesday after he wrote his letter that the matter was being taken up with the Local Authority, who had promised to give their answer by the end of the week and to make interim arrangements in the meantime! At least he would in all probability have been pleased. There is just the faintest of possibilities that he would have regarded the telephone call as an impertinence and a quite improper way of conducting public business and rushed off to his Member to tell him so. Every now and again the minority of civil servants which

does take chances of this kind catches a Tartar. But the risk to the officer or the Department, if the thing is discreetly done, is minute compared with the advantages likely to be gained by getting the case off to a proper start.

The telephone call has most of the advantages of the interview and one further advantage of its own. It is extremely quick and economical of official time. There is, however, the difficulty that trunk calls are expensive and have to be kept to a minimum. An officer who encourages the use of the telephone in a branch where everything has always been done by letter may well find himself in trouble with his Establishment Officer. And it will not be much use his pointing out that he is giving the public better service or laying up goodwill for the Department. His Establishment Branch will probably point out that the arm of the Treasury concerned does not appear to be impressed by such considerations. But if, by using the telephone and cutting down correspondence, he can save half a clerical officer, they will probably be placated. Staff savings are a currency which Establishment Officers generally understand.

Finally, before we leave this field, we must examine one further device which is being used here and there to give a little stretch to the fabric of public administration and to bring civil servants into closer touch with the public: the reformed use of the written word. We have seen enough to know that this is likely to be a difficult business. Official subject matter is intractable; the recipients of official letters are all too often suspicious or hostile, and their writers are, generally speaking, cautious, defensive, unimaginative. The precedents are unhelpful and the atmosphere discouraging. This is not to say that a great deal of lip-service is not paid, frequently in high places, to the desirability of writing simply and kindly. Sir Ernest Gowers' books provide excellent advice as to what should and what should not be done, and many of the points he has made are re-stated, month by month, year by year, by Training Officers throughout the service. But the task of leavening the lump is a thankless one. It is not merely a matter of getting keen young people to write well on subjects that interest them, in the

atmosphere of a sixth-form room. Many schoolmasters manage this tolerably well. It is a question of trying to induce new habits in a varied population of old hands, many of whom have been doggedly writing—and reading—officialese for upwards of forty years, and of preventing them from corrupting the young. And this has to be done among people who are, as a group, critical of any attempt to coddle the public, and who now and then appear to feel that the less the man at the other end is allowed to understand the better for everyone.

Another difficulty—one with which Sir Ernest Gowers did not deal specifically in *Plain Words*—derives from the constantly increasing mass of regulations, necessarily couched in legal language, that has to be administered and written and talked about. We have seen already that, whatever may be said of Acts of Parliament, regulations are things for which civil servants must take some responsibility. If these are too detailed and elaborate, and weigh too heavily on the backs of the public—and of public departments—senior civil servants are sometimes partly to blame. If they were always vigilant to exclude provisions that cannot be enforced or readily understood, there would be less regulations like this one:

> 'In this regulation the expression "illuminated area" means, in relation to a lamp, the area of the orthogonal projection on a vertical plane at right angles to the longitudinal axis of the vehicle of that part of the lamp through which light is emitted.'

It would be better if civil servants less often put themselves in a position of having to explain to village policemen and to inquisitive members of the public what such things mean. The cure is perhaps not always to be found in choosing the correct words or putting them in the proper order. One can sometimes, by using fewer words, and in fact by attempting less in the first place, avoid the necessity for embarrassing explanations altogether.

Another difficulty is the deeply felt need for consistency and safety. 'The style we like is the humdrum,' Sir Ernest

was told in youth; and this was obviously not a mere matter of literary taste. It was a reflection of the official philosophy of a race which believes itself to have found safety in precedents, danger in experiment.

It is all very well, their letters and their minutes say, implicitly, to talk of putting oneself in the other man's place. Experience has shown us that it is to everyone's advantage to indicate quite clearly that we know our place, that we know his—and that we expect him to keep it. There is, of course, a great deal in this. It is sometimes easier for officials, and, it may be argued, for Ministers, if people can be persuaded not to exercise their rights too zealously. But the game of denying information to the public for its own good is not a pretty one, and it is not one which one feels civil servants in a democracy ought to be caught playing very often. If a feeling for the humdrum and the supremely safe produces letters which are merely laconic some good may be done. It is when letters become so uninformative as to be cryptic or downright misleading that the public interest begins to suffer. The official humdrum is the right style for the right occasion, but when answering letters from members of the public one finds all too often that it suits neither the man nor the matter. To find a style that does, one must begin by putting oneself in the shoes of the person at the other end. There is, in other words, no way of writing effectively to the public without the constant exercise of sympathy and imagination. Unfortunately not all of us—in the service or out of it—possess a sufficiency of either.

Another difficulty—a minor one—is one of form. Many departments cling, in their correspondence with the public, to the formal style of address. They begin: 'Sir, I am directed by the Minister. . . .' And they end: 'I am, Sir, Your obedient servant.' Within this convention it is hard to be direct and easy. The form is all very well when you are setting out the law on some difficult or disputed subject, or when you are fairly sure that, in a few days' time, you are going to have to prosecute the recipient. But some of its advocates insist on its use where the public is being advised

on personal matters having only the faintest and most remote connexion with the law. It is safer, they say. So it is, perhaps, in the narrowest legal sense. But it is also cowardly. It makes bad blood and is better avoided.

Yet another difficulty derives from the scale on which many departments have to operate. When one is dealing daily with hundreds of almost identical requests or enquiries it is almost impossible to resist the case for the use of forms instead of letters. And even if the correspondence in a particular field is smaller and a little more varied it will be hard to manage without letting clerical officers make use of stock drafts and precedent letters. These things are very useful in their place. Only a fool would object to receiving a purely routine reply to a purely routine question. The trouble is that they seldom are kept in their place. The form or the stock draft, clumsily adapted perhaps, is used in an awkward or delicate case for which it was never intended. Some person outside the service is hurt, confused or irritated. Another battle has been lost. But a few minutes have been saved—for the moment. The odds are, of course, that the applicant will write again and more official time will be taken up in the end. But this is too often considered to be another matter.

We have noticed, in discussing the official uses and misuses of the written word, certain personal and psychological difficulties underlying the mechanical ones. It is almost as if, in using gobbledygook, civil servants were, in the words of an American observer, engaged in 'an attempt to make administration sound mysterious, difficult and complicated'. 'Do officials think they will dignify their status', asks the same observer, 'if they place an impenetrable veil of words over their works?' The answer is, unfortunately, that some of them do. There is, after all, a little of the lower-deck lawyer in all of us. We like to reveal what we know, and we seldom pause to enquire whether we are baffling or irritating other people in the process. It is also true that civil servants grow so used to dealing with laws, regulations, circulars and instructions that they accord some of them a respect which the public quite properly denies them. When a civil servant has lived with an old Act throughout his official lifetime it may

well mean more to him than it ever meant to the casual collection of lawyers and politicians who drafted it and hurried it through Parliament, possibly without debate, a hundred years ago. He will see meanings in it, and intentions—and virtues—that were never there. He will defend it, anomalies and all, with the greatest skill and vigour from marauding journalists and politicians. And if some particularly difficult section is removed, upon consolidation, shall we say, he will mourn its passing like that of an old friend.

We have found, too, that many of the efforts that are being made to shorten the processes of public administration and bring civil servants into closer and more direct contact with the people they serve are sporadic and ill-organised, depending rather on the attitude of some individual head of branch, Training Officer or other individual. In other words, while civil servants are subject to many pressures and answerable to many masters, they are seldom responsible to anyone for the way they treat the unorganised public. Parliament or the press, or their own Minister, or possibly a High Court Judge, will eventually pull them up if they step too far over the line—or stay there too long. But there is no formal means of checking the occasional petty oppressions, and the rare but damning displays of indifference or laziness or harshness which add something to the burdens of the public, and do much to diminish the reputation of the service. There is seldom anyone to insist on or reward the habitual use of sympathy and imagination or to promote, all down the chain of command, a positive readiness to grasp effectively the essence of the problems presented by personal applications.

In other spheres there are effective watchdogs. The Treasury, through its outposts in the Departments, controls the use of men and money. The Staff sides of the Whitley Councils help to look after the interests of the officials themselves. The Organisation and Methods Officer and the Training Officer both touch the margin of the field we have been considering. But there is no one in the heart of the Department, no organisation spreading through its branches,

capable of ensuring that humanity and kindliness are commonly exercised in its dealings with the public. The service has taken over from the business world, and developed for its own use, certain aids to mechanical efficiency, but it has not hitherto laid much emphasis on another matter that is seldom overlooked in commerce—the fostering of goodwill. We shall be enquiring in our next chapter whether it would be practicable to make formal arrangements to this end, or whether it will be necessary, as in the past, to leave it to the overworked consciences of individual civil servants.

CHAPTER IX

Summing up

We have travelled over the same ground several times in this book, looking at the non-specialist middle grades of the home civil service from various points of view. In these officials the strengths and weaknesses of the whole service are personified: understand them and one is on the way to understanding everything that most matters about it; ignore them and all talk of what is right and wrong with it—of what it can and cannot perform, becomes the merest theorising.

The authors of the Haldane Committee's report long since perceived that the great Departments of Whitehall had continuing characteristics of their own; and much attention has since been paid to the contribution made by the administrative class to those characteristics. The theme of the present book is that to understand the process of Government, and to learn where and why the shoe really pinches, one must be prepared on occasion to look right down the chain of command and enquire how the people at various levels are trained and deployed, what their relations are with others, inside and outside the service, and what are the mainsprings of their behaviour as individuals.

Let us make a summary of some of the discoveries we have made in this way, pausing as we go to consider some of their implications. We noticed to begin with that the bulk of the people in these crucial middle ranks of the service had arrived there by selection from within, that most junior administrators and senior executives were not, in fact, direct entrants to the class in which they now find themselves and that very many of these promotees were men and women

who had spent a long official life climbing, very slowly at first, the rungs of the service ladder. We noticed, too, that within ten years many of these people will have passed out of the service, and that, for various reasons, much of the power and influence they wield will fall into the hands of very much younger men of quite different characteristics.

As regards the deployment of civil servants, we noticed that much influence still lies within departments, and that, despite the unifying functions of the Treasury and its various allies, the level and manner of employment of individual officers and the nature of their tasks were still largely departmental matters. We saw that the same was largely true of such things as training and organisation and methods, and that in the conditioning of civil servants the departmental atmosphere, and the attitude and degree of efficiency of the junior supervisors—members of those middle grades on whom we have focused our attention—are potentially of supreme importance.

At this point, as we saw, lies the hinge of the service, the meeting place of two essentially different types: the administrative amateur—quick, light, theoretical—and the executive—heavily professional. And we saw, too, the blurring of the types at certain points, the rubbing of shoulders, the class-to-class promotions and the difficulty of separating the two sorts of work in practice or of drawing any useful line between policy-making and execution, between thinking subtle thoughts and ensuring their practical application.

Looking further down the chain, we saw executives supervising a great mass of clerical and comparable staff, sharing with them much of the detailed day to day work of the service, answering the public's written enquiries and, in many departments, dealing with them face to face. We noticed here that the chain of command was sometimes dangerously long, that standards of training and supervision varied enormously and that the difficult and developing art of staff management is not always taken as seriously as one might wish at all levels of the service. And we saw that the whole machine has become so very, very, big and so enormously complicated that systems have developed within

systems, so that at the top of the service one finds senior officials inhabiting a world of semi-official correspondence and easy informal contacts—and in general breathing an air that is clearer and more refreshing than that of the more thickly populated slopes below.

But what of this official jungle itself? How badly overgrown is it? And what is to be done about it? To get our answers to these questions into perspective we must begin by making certain disclaimers. First, the problems we are considering are not peculiar to this country; they affect the public service of every great power and they are present, in varying proportions, in those of smaller states. In the words of Professor Mackenzie, 'We can comfort ourselves greatly by a glance at our neighbours. Washington is a joke of quite a different order of magnitude from Whitehall, and when it ceases to amuse it terrifies.' Second, the problems are by no means new. The following complaint, for instance, might have been written yesterday by one of our young administrative 'Samurai':

'I am thoroughly sick of this place and would like to resign. Now the novelty has worn off, I am bored nine-tenths of the time and rather unreasonably irritated the other tenth whenever I can't have my own way. It's maddening to have thirty people who can reduce you to impotence when you're quite certain you are right. I am enraged just now over another memorial. A poor man has been censured for doing X, and after repeated memorials . . . has now memorialised the Secretary of State, vehemently denying that he ever did anything of the kind. I have demonstrated quite clearly that he is wholly innocent of X, but that if he had been charged with a quite different offence Y, and if he had been allowed to reply and the thing had been investigated, he would probably have deserved censure for Y. But it seems that, whatever else is done, censure for doing X should be cancelled. They say—No, he deserves censure, and therefore censure must be maintained.

This theory that if even a tolerable face can be put on the matter Government never withdraws anything—even in

matters of justice—seems to me quite wrong and very dangerous. . . .

Then the preoccupation, which seems characteristic of officials, to save their own skin, is fatal. ******'s dread of taking any responsibility is almost pathetic. And of course it prevents any original or sporting proposal ever being made. . . .'

It was, in fact, written by J. M. Keynes, then of the India Office, on 13th September, 1907; and it suggests that the occupational diseases of men banded together to govern others do not change very much over the years. There is, perhaps, no particular reason why one should expect them to, or why modern society should produce any revolutionary alteration in the attitude of the governed, whose 'natural impulse', according to Bagehot, 'is to resist authority'. One must recognise human nature for what it is, inside and outside the service, and make the best of it.

It is also worth pointing out, at this stage, that many of the things that most need attention in the service cannot be dealt with effectively from outside. In some cases external pressures, combined with action by the Treasury, might usefully set things in motion, but as one nears the heart of any given problem one almost always finds that one is concerned with the character and behaviour of individuals and small groups of people, within departments, and indeed, frequently within branches. And many of these are relatively junior officials, minor supervisors, not, in terms of Cicero's aphorism, 'wise men' to be 'instructed by reason', but 'men of less understanding, instructed by experience'. Once-for-all directives, issued from the centre, are not likely to have much lasting effect on their performance; and winning their interest and coaxing them along new paths is likely to be a prolonged and tedious business, and one that can only be carried out by people close at hand and having some acquaintance with the tasks to be performed in the branch or office concerned.

At those lower levels of the service, we have seen human mediocrity doing its daily best to administer a vast complex of regulations and instructions. The question here is whether

one can somehow reduce the complexity of the tasks to be performed, shorten the line of command, cut out unnecessary stages and processes and so harness the abilities and catch the enthusiasm of the people concerned as to breathe life and meaning into the service, particularly at points where it most frequently comes into contact with ordinary, unorganised and unrepresented members of the public. This is a formidable task and the subject matter is unpromising. How is it to be done? How is the junior civil servant whose chief bane is perhaps that he too often 'lives not according to the light of reason, but after the fashion of others' to be taught to bring the whole of his mind to bear on his daily work and to do it bravely, grasping his problems, dealing with them as far as possible on their merits and seeing at least some of the implications? How is the 'woodenness' that from time to time brings a blush to the cheeks of people inside the service to be replaced by lightness of touch? How are the builders of little empires, who exist in this—as in all large organisations—to be taught to become the kind of people who, in terms applied to the ideal welfare worker by a medical observer recently, 'set out in their task with the deliberate intention and ever-present aim of rendering their jobs completely unnecessary?'

The answer, so far as the existing population of junior civil servants is concerned, must lie largely in the pressures that can be brought to bear from inside the service—the leadership afforded by their direct supervisors, the opportunities for training and for earning promotion that can be offered, the sympathy and imagination that can be shown by Establishment Officers and administrative heads of branches and the positive interest taken in their activities by the Departmental Whitley Councils. If every civil servant having other civil servants under him believed, with Sir Raymond Streat, that 'a second industrial revolution is most definitely taking place in which the human factor is to rank first and to replace the dominance of the material and financial factors', the situation could be rapidly transformed. Even if, as is more nearly within the bounds of probability, a steadily increasing proportion of the younger generation

of civil service supervisors can be helped to develop an active interest in the managerial aspects of official tasks, and can be induced to pause and consider which of these are worth doing and which could be simplified, cut to the bone or dispensed with, the revolution of which Sir Raymond has spoken would be on the way, so far as the lower ranks of the civil service were concerned.

How is one to stir up the service supervisors, the higher executive officers and the senior executive officers, bring the bad ones up to the level of the best, make them all, as it were, honorary Training and Organisation and Methods Officers and help to get the inner recesses of the service spring-cleaned by the people who best know where the dust lies thickest? It is not an easy task, and, so far as some of the older supervisors, who are now passing out of the service, are concerned, it is probably not worth attempting. This is by no means true of the whole generation, but its members are not in general likely to prove promising material for experiments of this kind. They have been going steadily along at the same pace, coping in the same way with the same sort of problem, too long to be readily responsive to new demands—particularly where these are made by younger, though senior, officials. But there are many honourable exceptions. Among the thousands of younger executives there is, as we have seen, very promising material. These men and women, many of them now in their thirties, have for the most part brought good educational qualifications into the service. Some of them have mental equipment of a type that would now probably take a young person to a university. The problem is how to arrest the present tendency for people of this type to leave their academic and general interests at the gates and to settle down to standards, based on the capabilities of their less gifted colleagues, which do not always require them to give of their best or to develop qualities of courage and resourcefulness. How is the pace of this great army to be raised above that of its slowest member?

It has been suggested earlier that, at this crucial level, training of various kinds has, potentially, a great part to play. At present, much less attention is given to the training

of this half of the hinge than to that of the junior administrators who comprise the other half. This is understandable. There are not at any one time more than a few hundred assistant principals and young principals who are within the orbit of training, and important tasks, requiring a very high degree of skill and intelligence clearly await them. Money spent on training these young men is likely to be money well spent. The position of the executives is different. Only a small proportion of them, as things are, seems likely to break through the barrier and join the administrative class; and many of them, still in their thirties, cannot expect more than one further step in promotion in the whole of their service career. Moreover there are so many more of them than there are junior administrators that it is difficult to offer them the occasional trip abroad that usually comes the way of the young administrator, to fit them in to the few training courses run by the Treasury or to let them sit at the feet of the great for a time in the private offices of Ministers.

Yet these people are, as we have seen, not only the daily aides and consultants of administrators and helpmates of professional officers; they are transmitters of ideas, takers of decisions and managers and direct supervisors of very large numbers of junior executive and clerical staff at the base of the pyramid. They are, in many ways, even better placed than the junior administrators to see that things are done well lower down in the service and to initiate the thousands of minor adjustments that must continually be made if it is to do its work properly in changing conditions and is not to waste the potential talents of many of its members.

They can, of course, be greatly assisted by the administrators, with whom they are in such close contact, where, as is increasingly the case, the relationship is a free and friendly one, each side recognising the other's strengths and possible weaknesses. Junior administrators do nowadays generally regard their executive aides, and more particularly the younger ones, as people who are not only doing a useful job but are capable of being trained to do a better one. There is, all the same, still room for improvement in this respect here and there. These young executives could also be used to

better advantage if time and money could be found to help them to meet their contemporaries in other departments and also outside the service in discussions and in courses of lectures connected with their work. It would do the service a great deal of good if all the middle grade officers who were capable of benefiting from it could now and then attend a week-end school run somewhat on the lines of Stoke D'Abernon. Things of this kind have been done here and there from time to time, but not on a scale that makes much impact on the more senior executives as a whole.

Another possibility which has already been touched on is that of devising a suitable external examination, or set of examinations, and perhaps stimulating interest in it by offering appropriate allowances rather like those given to graduate teachers. Providing a suitable series of courses and arranging for the recognition of various external qualifications would not be an easy business. No one would wish to see civil servants put at a series of fences like the one that looms before young insurance clerks or asked to spend their evenings memorising an immense amount of detail that few of them will ever use. Nor, on the other hand, does one much want a 'ticket' that people will get merely to give themselves a rather spurious feeling of being professional people, or of having kept up, academically speaking, with the specialists.

What one wants is something a little less time-consuming than a degree, a little less formally based on previous educational qualifications and a little more closely related than most degree courses to the day-to-day work of the service. One wants, too, a balance between subjects, such as staff management, organisations and methods, statistics and the elements of law and accountancy, which are likely to be of direct use to middle grade civil servants, and background subjects, such as history, English literature, logic and philosophy, that may help them to become more gracious and rounded individuals.

The object of encouraging executive civil servants to equip themselves with qualifications of this kind would be threefold: to broaden their horizons; to help them acquire the tools of their trade, and to supplement the existing

methods of selection for promotion. The arrangements ought to reflect this, and allow as much range as possible in the number and level of subjects taken. It should be a question, as with the General Certificate of Education, not so much of having or not having a diploma, but of having taken courses and passed tests at certain levels in the subjects of one's choice. These ought, as has been said, to include some of direct interest to the service, but they should also include cultural subjects, some of which could well be taken in existing further education institutions. Where special courses were run the standard should be high and the opportunities for questions and constructive discussions considerable; and some effort should be made to draw in people from outside the service. Many of the executives have much to give, as well as great capacity to receive, in matters affecting management and administration generally. It would not be easy to set these arrangements in motion, but it would be worth doing, and if done well might immensely improve the standards of the whole service.

Among the fruits of a scheme of this kind would be a more positive approach to problems of organisation and management, a fuller understanding in the average supervisor of the need to make the most of his staff and a knowledge of some of the techniques by which it is possible to give better service to the public. The service would thus be on the road to solution of another problem which we noted earlier, that of applying the lessons taught by the efficiency experts closely and continuously to areas of the service to which Treasury Organisation and Methods teams and the Organisation and Methods Officers of the Departments cannot easily penetrate. It would be increasingly common for a supervisor to have sufficient knowledge and interest to meet the experts half way, and to initiate, without prompting, many of the minor changes which make all the difference between having a happy and lively team and one that is continually scraping along from crisis to crisis.

It may be objected that any scheme which succeeded in training the more able and ambitious executives for higher work would merely have the effect of piling up numbers of

capable people against impassable promotion barriers. But this is to mistake the character of the training recommended, which would be calculated to help the officer concerned to develop a more constructive and imaginative attitude to his work as well as to equip him to cover a wider range of quasi-administrative duties. It is noticeable that when people are stretched and awakened in this way the outcome is not usually so much a thirst for immediate promotion as an increased interest in the implications of the officer's present work and greater satisfaction in doing it. Furthermore, if these arrangements did, in the long run, produce more people from within the service able to take the full range of administrative responsibility this would be no bad thing, and it ought not to be impossible to adjust the machinery so as to make full use of them.

It has been suggested elsewhere, notably by Dr. Gladden, that the class divisions within the service are not now very meaningful, and also that the grades might in some cases be broken down into further, somewhat more logical, divisions. And we have seen in the present book that the area where the administrative and executive classes meet and overlap is somewhat confused. It is also clear that work done by members of the various clerical and executive grades varies enormously in difficulty and importance from branch to branch and officer to officer. We have seen, too, that the promotion arrangements, resting as they do on seniority, tempered by a reporting system of varying reliability, are not always completely satisfactory, and that able men must sometimes remain for a number of years without any real prospect of advancement.

One way of easing this difficulty would be to look again at the range of duties performed by clerical, junior executive and higher executive officers, with a view to seeing whether they could not be divided into four or five, instead of the present three bands, and also whether it would be appropriate to pay allowances to officers who took the trouble to equip themselves with suitable qualifications. It ought to be possible by this means to clear a way for a really brilliant junior to move rapidly up the ladder, while also allowing the

less brilliant, but steady and hard-working officer to be suitably rewarded and to move more slowly to his proper level. What must be avoided, at all costs, is a feeling of stagnation, and the frustration that is born of the knowledge that promotion is for the time being completely out of reach.

At the same time attention might be paid with advantage to the meeting ground of the administrative and executive classes, to the grades, that is, running down from assistant secretary to higher executive officer. Here we are, of course, treading on very difficult ground. The conception of an administrative corps d'élite, poised at the summit of the service and recruited largely from the universities, has gained a firm hold on the imagination of many people, inside and outside the service; and the direct entrant from a university who makes his way fairly quickly to the summit of the service has quite obviously something very important to contribute. His self confidence and occasional touch of daring, his ability to see departmental affairs in their general setting and his ability to deal with influential people outside the service on equal terms, as well as his intellectual capacity, are things which, as we have seen, the old-style executives, ground in the slow mills of the service and lacking an educational background comparable with that of the administrators, have not invariably possessed.

But we have seen, too, that the narrowing of the range of educational possibilities generally, the upheavals of the war years and the expansion of the number of posts at the top of the service have all helped to blur the distinction between the classes and to make some kind of reassessment desirable. Possibly nothing very far-reaching is needed, but a little tidying seems necessary. There has always been some promotion from the executive to the administrative class, though it has been apt to come rather late in life; and, as we have seen, getting on for half the present administrators arrived in this way. More recently, it has been arranged that one-fifth of each year's small intake of assistant principals should be recruited by examination from inside the service. There is at the same time provision for graduates to come into the executive class and a number of the present members

of the class have come in in this way. We have also seen that, in practice, liaison between senior executives and junior administrators is often very close and that it would not always be easy to describe the basis of the division of labour as between principals, shall we say, and junior or chief executive officers.

It ought not to be difficult, then, to absorb all the really imaginative and capable executives who may come along at any time into the highest ranges of the service, while at the same time leaving the door sufficiently open to attract the best people from the universities. In so far as the service grew more successful as a trainer of its own people more room would be needed at the top for promotees from within and it would be necessary to take rather fewer graduates and possibly to let them come in at one of two or three different levels, according to their quality. This would also facilitate the side-ways movement of professional officers into the managerial ranks of the service. The system would differ from the present one only in degree, though it would look very different on paper. If the present, rather forced distinction between the executive and administrative classes were to disappear in the course of the change this would probably be no bad thing—for reasons which we shall now discuss.

Psychologically, the 'Apartheid' of the administrators has not always been a good thing. It has encouraged the belief, which ought by now to be thoroughly discredited, that there is such a thing as pure administration, which can be conducted, as it were, by a man in a balloon, concerned to look up on occasion, and on occasion at other men in other balloons, but never, by any chance, at the comings and goings on the ground below. It has encouraged officers bent on administration of this kind to allow layer upon layer of wraps and intermediaries to be placed between them and the people or problems they are supposed to be dealing with, and to see themselves much more in the light of secretaries to Ministers than as managers of their branches and, in quite a direct way, servants of the public. It has also helped to perpetuate the fiction that Ministers are in every sense responsible for all the activities and inactivities of

their officials. The moment one begins to look closely at the processes of administration, as actually carried out in the various branches of a Government Department, one is forced to the conclusion that here and there, in this respect or that, the Minister has not been and could not reasonably have been consulted, and that, whatever the constitutional position, the practical responsibility for the situation and the key to its improvement lies within the service. If the machinery is to be improved, many administrators, in many areas of the service, will have to look less towards their official superiors and towards Ministers and more towards the working of their branches. The administrator will have to become, at least for the time being, less of a secretary, more of a manager.

The distinction between the two classes has not helped the executives either. Some of them have been willing to assume that their functions stopped short of policy-making, that theirs is but to do and do, and that it would be impertinent for them to bring a critical intelligence to bear on the pronouncements issued from above. This has sometimes produced a blind loyalty that does not really achieve the result intended by the man who gave the order and in fact falls far short of what might have been affected with the aid of intelligent co-operation at all levels. This attitude is being slowly whittled away, but traces of it will doubtless remain until the somewhat unreal distinction between the classes is itself removed.

One of the difficulties about doing this is, of course, that the administrators, as a class, are not unnaturally a little jealous of their special position—and rightly so. It is a salutary thing that close to Ministers and prominent among their advisers there should be 'generalists', unhampered by specialist or professional bias and not unduly weighed down by detail. No one would wish to diminish the authority of this unique body of advisers, but one would wish to rescue it from the danger of self-caricature and to anchor it rather more firmly to the official—and unofficial—facts of life.

It does administrators no harm to be associated, in the right way, and to the right extent, with the process of

management. They can, as we have seen, ensure that advice tendered by Organisation and Methods Officers is used to the utmost, and that outside standards are not lost sight of in the day to day running of their branches. They can see to it that training is carried out and that a proper balance is kept between the necessary drills connected with the work and the general stretching process that ought to be applied to all young officers. They can ensure that the question 'Why' is always asked by their executives before undertaking any new commitment, and that indecision, carelessness and lack of imagination do not allow their part of the service to become—or remain—encrusted with superfluous procedures and unreasonably elaborate safety devices. And, in presiding over the cutting down and simplification of the processes of government and giving the executives a lead in this field, they will achieve a realism and a grasp of affairs which will do them, and the country, no harm when they come later to advise Ministers and those about them on matters of high policy.

Administrators can also usefully give a lead in dealing with the great mass of enquiries from the public which are met with more particularly in the social service sector. We have noticed that it is rare for administrative civil servants to see these queries at present, unless some special consideration—interest shown by a Member of Parliament, for instance, or the fact that a difficult point of law or practice seems to be involved—causes them to be referred above executive level. Nor do they generally superintend the development and design of stock drafts or the accumulation of precedents. Yet, if full value is to be got for money spent on the social services, and the welfare state is not to impose new burdens on the very people it is intended to assist, ways must be found of bringing to official correspondence and official dealings with ordinary people some of the sensitivity, directness and lightness of touch which, as we have seen, already characterises the semi-official correspondence conducted by administrators, and distinguish their horizontal relations with people at or about their own level inside and outside the service.

This leavening process is likely to be prolonged and difficult, and in some instances the first task is to convince the official concerned that it needs to be done. The semi-detachment of senior officials and their comparative freedom from technical detail are, as we have said, things of which the service has traditionally been proud. So are the informality that is possible in the small world behind the scenes and the conventions that prevail there—one of which is the tradition that each of its inhabitants must be ready at a moment's notice to turn his hand to anything. These things clearly help to make administration flexible and to avoid some of the absurd protractions and pomposities found in countries where every official starts, and sometimes finishes, by being an expert. It would indeed be a pity to lose them, but the facts of the situation seem to demand that some attempt should be made to expand the area of their effectiveness by encouraging junior administrators to take a suitable interest in the processes that they are helping to set in motion and in their actual effect on the people concerned.

A further difficulty is that, even if it is admitted that interest, guidance and control of this kind are necessary, it may be argued that it is not for the administrators to supply them. This, it may be said, is a task, not for the policy-makers, but for others—the senior executives, the Information Officers, the practitioners of Organisation and Methods, the Establishment Officers, watched over, in the last resort, by the Treasury. We have seen that the premise of this argument, that policy and practice are abruptly divisible, is a false one, and we have outlined measures designed to help the executives, for their part, to assist in the higher fields of management. It is equally desirable to find ways and means of helping the administrators, and particularly those who bring to the service concepts recently acquired and minds recently trained in the universities, to play their full part in ordering, and enlightening, the lower depths of the service.

This is not in the least an easy matter. The junior administrator is seldom able to wipe the slate clean. He will generally take over a branch or system moulded by other

hands, and he will not infrequently pass on to other duties before he has had time to shape it to his heart's desire. He will have, moreover, to concern himself continually with the horizontal relations with heads of other branches and with the vertical relations with his own superiors on which his reputation as an administrator will largely depend. And he will also have to deal with the cases that come to him automatically, as part of the system of pressures which has been described earlier, and cope, as best he can, with the crises caused by parliamentary business of one kind or another. His role will thus be largely defensive, and he will not always have sufficient time or energy in reserve to move over to the offensive and make work for himself by trying to reorganise his branch, to reconsider the function of each part of it and to make sure that each individual in it knows what he is doing and is doing as much as he reasonably can. Nevertheless, once the paramount importance of this task is realised, it can usually be done. The methods and tempo will vary from branch to branch and from office to office, but one of the keys to success will almost always be intelligent delegation, sometimes only for the time being, of things that matter less. Others will be moral courage and a willingness to swim against the stream and take—and give—a buffet now and then. If he is to chart, review, cut down and replant the area over which he now presides, the average administrator will find it necessary to let go down to the executives some things with which he now concerns himself. Some drafts will have to go unchecked, some letters be signed at lower levels, some decisions be taken—for better or for worse—by the first, not the fourth man who sees the file, some consultation be cut short, some commas remain uninserted. This is one reason why the training and proper deployment of the senior executives is so vitally important. If work is to be delegated there must be people ready to do it well.

On the other hand, if the administrator is to be the controlling agent and the 'goodwill' officer we have talked about in a previous chapter—and it is difficult to see who else could possibly fill this role without a fundamental reorganisation of the whole structure of public administration,

he must learn how to impose certain new controls and exercise what will usually be to him new techniques connected with staff management, training, organisation and public relations. The task of the head of branch is, then, one of great complexity. He must control the machine, at times displaying great sensitivity, yet at other times not scorning the aid of a sledge hammer. He must be, in words used by the *Economist* in a similar connexion a hundred years ago, 'a man of business, not a man of genius'. But at the same time he must be capable of looking about him and must try to relate what the machine is doing to events in the world outside. He must be a master of timing, but not a time server, an opportunist but not bereft of principle; and he and his colleagues must be forever asking themselves, in respect of almost every issue connected with their branches:

> 'Must we hold on?
> Or can we now let go?
> Or is it even possible that we must do both?'

It becomes obvious that if he is to do his job properly the less senior administrative officer, the principal, say, or assistant secretary, needs support from the colleagues about and above him, as well as from the executives below. He needs the sympathy of his under-secretary, the help of his Establishment Officer, the co-operation of those concerned with training, organisation and public relations and, in the background, the approval of Ministers and of the Treasury.

Sometimes, in an imperfect world, he does not enjoy all these things and, now and then, even in areas where the managerial approach is particularly necessary he is encouraged to busy himself rather with other matters. Yet his influence, if properly applied can be decisive and, taking the service as a whole, he and his colleagues are of a calibre by no means unequal to the task.

Are there means, then, whereby these more junior administrators could be encouraged to devote themselves increasingly to this task of perpetual surveillance, to give it due prominence and not to quail before its immensity? Is there, for instance, any way in which the Treasury could

assist? The possibility of training comes at once to mind and fortunately, in this case, the numbers are so small that a great deal could be done in this way at little expense. The difficulty is to arrive at the right kind of training and the right instructors. There is nothing worse than for senior people to be invited to a course only to find that the general level of discussion is too low or that the instructors have nothing to add. The administrators concerned are not the kind of people to be much impressed by platitudinous generalities on the one hand or by the pseudo-scientist jargon popular with some efficiency experts on the other. What is needed, in the main, is the brief exposition of a few possible lines of action and the explanation of things that are being done in related fields, by people of sufficient acumen and experience to command respect, and ample time for discussion and reflection. The logic of the situation ought to do the rest.

The Treasury is also in a position to add practice to precept by co-ordinating rather more closely than at present the probes which its various divisions, those concerned with staffing, with financial matters and with training and Organisation and Methods, make from time to time into the Departments. Some co-operation already exists, but it would serve as an excellent example to Departments if the liaison were somewhat strengthened and made more obvious. It would then be apparent that when the Treasury looks at a Department it looks at it as a whole, and that there is a complete unity of theory and practice, particular suggestions and recommendations always being related to a central concept of the Department's function and the nature of the work it is supposed to be doing. This is asking a great deal, and to accomplish it would cost men and money. But if a temporary strengthening of central control induced Departments to proceed at a quicker pace with their spring-cleaning it would pay for itself, not least by hastening the log run-down of junior staff.

Is there anything further that could be done to help administrators and their junior colleagues to set and keep their house in order and to secure, and maintain, the

goodwill of the public. It is fairly clear, in the light of what we have seen, that any such assistance, if it comes from outside the service, can only be marginal. It is in Departments, and in branches of Departments, that the real strain must be taken. But it is at least worth while to examine the various outside pressures, particularly the quasi-political ones, we have already noticed, with a view to seeing whether some of them cannot be turned to advantage.

We have seen that many of the pressures on the service are parliamentary, but that those exerted by the press, by the Courts and by the innumerable professional, statutory and voluntary bodies which make up the special public of the various departments are scarcely less significant. We have seen, too, that the unorganised public does not at present often exert a direct influence on civil servants taking important decisions, though we have discussed ways in which, by making various adjustments within the service, this particular kind of pressure, which is potentially of the greatest importance, could more often make itself felt at a higher level. Is it at all possible to take further steps, of a more general character, to canalise these pressures and to get them to operate more frequently on the right man at the right moment, without too much impeding the course of public business?

There is a climate of opinion outside the service which suggests that something of this sort should be attempted; but many close observers hesitate to suggest specific measures for fear of impeding the decision-making processes. The example of Washington haunts everyone, and there is, very naturally, no general desire to strangle the administrators with new restrictions of a quasi-judicial character. What almost everyone would like, if it could be managed, would be a mild check on departments which could be used to explore some of those hard cases that are sometimes revealed by questions in Parliament and to lay some of the ghosts glimpsed from time to time by the sub-committees of the Committee of Estimates.

Any such check would probably have the immediate effect of making life a little more difficult for Ministers and

for senior civil servants. It would occasionally mean laying bare the roots—and even the seeds—of policy in circumstances where they can at present be concealed. But this in itself ought not to preclude its being instituted if it would serve the public interest in the long run. Whether checks of this kind can be imposed in such a way as to throw light in dark places without unduly hampering the processes of Government it is difficult to say without trying them. Certainly, it would seem unlikely that any generally acceptable formula could be devised. What would suit the Ministry of Education would be completely out of place so far as the Commonwealth Relations Office was concerned; and something tailored to suit the Ministry of Housing and Local Government would not suit, shall we say, the Home Office.

A more helpful approach would be by way of seeing whether more teeth could not be given, here and there, to the consultative bodies of various kinds which already assist Ministers. This would not, generally speaking, involve legislation but merely decisions by Ministers to review the terms of reference, composition and performance of the consultative bodies at their disposal, with a view to making more robust use of them. Much depends on what is meant by consultation, and on the relative importance attached, on the one hand, to preserving the Department's freedom of action and, on the other, to maintaining liaison with the outside world and obtaining honest advice. Where the former consideration is predominant the terms of reference of a consultative body can be cut down and its agenda paper so arranged as to make it a conveniently tame body. But if the latter consideration is given due weight and there is a willingness to give and take, and to conceive that the Department may now and then be wrong much that is of permanent advantage can sometimes be achieved.

Pursuing this line of thought for a moment, it is interesting to speculate as to what might happen if one of the social service Departments, or possibly a branch of one of them, were to set up a small committee, chaired by some private or academic person of distinction from outside the Department and including besides one or two of its own assistant

secretaries and a representative of its staff side, some parliamentarians and other members of its special public. If such a committee were able to ask questions on matters arising out of the Department's relations with the public, and to get members of the Department to come along from time to time to explain the practical advantages of doing this or the inherent impossibility of doing that, much good would accrue. The committee's advice would be tendered in the last resort to the Minister and if he did not like it he would not have to accept it. He might, of course, find that he had admitted a Trojan horse and that the committee was playing to the gallery and submitting his administrative acts to unfair criticism. If so it could doubtless be disbanded. But the experiment would be worth trying, particularly if fairly liberal arrangements were made for getting subjects on to the committee's agenda paper.

The chief attraction of a committee of this kind would be that it would help to remove doubt as to the motives and intentions of persons traditionally in the other camp. Much of the criticism of Ministers on purely administrative matters, and much of the doubt as to the intentions of their officials that exists in Parliament at any one time is based on misunderstandings or lack of appreciation of the issues involved. On the other hand, much bureaucratic secrecy and precaution is based on the frequently misconceived view that it is not safe to be frank with outsiders. Personal contacts and the give and take of argument and discussion such as a genuine consultative body makes possible, help to enlarge the area of mutual confidence, grease the wheels of Government and enable each side to learn from the other. It would be a pity to neglect this particular administrative tool for fear that an outsider might now and then discover that someone inside the service had made a mistake. People in the civil service are always making mistakes, just as people outside are; and the measure of their usefulness is whether, despite this liability to human error, their general standards and their long-term performance are good. The more civil servants who understand this, and who realise that it is useless to try to humbug the public into thinking that the official

is always right, the better. There is nothing more salutary—or more disarming—than to admit frankly that one was wrong and to promise to do better; and if improved consultative machinery here and there encourages the growth of this kind of response to justifiable criticism the time and trouble spent on it will not be wasted.

It remains to sum up and to stress once again that the key to full efficiency in the civil service lies in the intelligent use of the people in it. If they can be kept in good heart, efficiently trained and deployed and shown work which has a pattern and meaning which they can understand, many things immediately become possible that could never be achieved merely by setting up this or that machinery or making such or such arrangements for future recruitment. These have their proper place, but the really striking gains that could be made at small cost are to be had by helping existing civil servants, particularly those in the middle and lower grades, to realise their own personal potential. Where they can be shown, even indirectly, that they are doing work that matters to other people—possibly people not unlike themselves—and encouraged to grasp the problems it creates and to hunger and thirst to take decisions about them, efficient methods, easier relations with outside bodies and persons and the shedding of wasteful and unnecessary procedures will generally follow. The great pre-requisite is that the work should seem to matter and that senior officers should be seen to think that it does and to be on the look-out for ways of doing it better—that is to say more simply, more directly, with more humanity and with less avoidable formality.

The modern civil service is a Leviathan of immense power, tremendously dangerous and seldom conscious of all the implications of its actions on the lives of individuals and on the shape of society. It is in promoting in the minds of civil servants a fuller understanding of these implications and the continuous exercise of restraint and even humility in the wielding of the power at their disposal that the managerial grades of the service can at present best serve the public. This is not at all an easy business. Power corrupts

and prolonged authority encrusts. It is not always simple to turn one's back on the easy way of acquiescence in existing practices, or to examine with a puritanical eye procedures which seem to have served their turn well enough in the past. It is not easy, either, to resist the implicit appeal of loyalty to an office or a Department, or to one's official colleagues, because it appears to conflict with a larger, vaguer loyalty to people in general. But it is only by dint of countless minor and quite undramatic decisions of this kind, made from day to day by various civil servants in various Departments that the service can hope to keep pace with the commitments which society has placed upon it.

One must hope that enough of these exceptionally difficult decisions will be made to do rather more than keep pace with outside events, and that where one is evidently not made with sufficient smoothness or promptitude critics outside the service will not be too ready to cast a stone. It requires some courage and persistence to renovate a great and responsible organisation from within. Civil servants who set out to simplify and to give a human touch to the processes of Government have excellent precedents to support them, but they are working with intractable material. They will need all the help they can get.

APPENDICES

Appendix One. Non-Industrial Civil Servants.

Appendix Two. Distribution of Civil Servants as between Departments.

Appendix Three. The Administrative Class.

Appendix Four. The Executive Class.

Appendix Five. The Clerical Class.

Appendix Six. The Clerical Assistant Class.

Appendix Seven. Top-structure of a medium-sized Social Service Department.

Appendix Eight. Establishment Branch of a Small Office.

APPENDIX ONE

Non-Industrial Civil Servants

NUMBERS AND MAIN GROUPS
(1st July, 1953)

	Numbers	*Per cent.*
Administrative class	2,822	0·4
Executive classes	69,310	9·3
Clerical and Sub-clerical classes	200,140	26·9
Typing grades	28,779	3·9
Professional, scientific and technical classes	74,273	10·0
Post Office manipulative grades (including cleaners, etc.)	210,944	28·3
Messengers, cleaners, etc. (except Post Office)	30,511	4·1
Post Office Engineering and allied grades	71,851	9·6
Others	55,882	7·5
Total	744,512	100

Note: These figures, like those in Appendices Three, Four, Five and Six are taken from the *Introductory Factual Memorandum on the Civil Service*, submitted by H.M. Treasury to the Royal Commission on the Civil Service (1953). They exclude the Foreign Service but include the Post Office engineering and allied grades, who are regarded for some purposes as industrial. Like all the other Crown Copyright material in this book, these figures are reproduced by permission of the Controller of H.M. Stationery Office.

APPENDIX TWO

Departmental Distribution of Civil Servants

(1st January, 1955)

Department	*Number of Staff on* 1st *January*, 1955
A. CIVIL DEPARTMENTS (other than Post Office)	
I. TRADE, INDUSTRY AND TRANSPORT:	
Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries	12,462
Ministry of Food	5,727
Forestry Commission	2,204
Ministry of Fuel and Power	2,125
Ministry of Labour and National Service	23,277
Department of Scientific and Industrial Research	3,180
Board of Trade	7,405
Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation	10,597
*Other Departments in this Group	2,467
TOTAL FOR TRADE, INDUSTRY AND TRANSPORT	**69,444**
II. SOCIAL SERVICES:	
Ministry of Education	2,884
Ministry of Health	5,846
Ministry of Housing and Local Government	3,038
National Assistance Board	10,116
Ministry of Pensions and National Insurance	37,207
*Other Departments in this Group	6,114
TOTAL FOR SOCIAL SERVICES	**65,205**
III. REVENUE DEPARTMENTS (other than Post Office):	
Customs and Excise	14,950
Inland Revenue	50,175
TOTAL FOR REVENUE DEPARTMENTS (excluding Post Office)	**65,125**

Department	*Number of Staff on 1st January, 1955*
IV. AGENCY SERVICES:	
Ordnance Survey	4,030
Stationery Office	3,043
Ministry of Works	13,174
*Other Departments in this Group	755
TOTAL FOR AGENCY SERVICES	**21,002**
V. CENTRAL GOVERNMENT, HOME AND LEGAL DEPARTMENTS:	
County Courts	2,004
Home Office	3,306
Prison Commission	6,591
* Other Departments in this Group	11,860
TOTAL FOR CENTRAL GOVERNMENT, HOME AND LEGAL DEPARTMENTS	**23,761**
VI. FOREIGN AND IMPERIAL SERVICES:	
Foreign Office	5,593
* Other Departments in this Group	2,749
TOTAL FOR FOREIGN AND IMPERIAL SERVICES	**8,342**
Grand Total for Civil Departments other than Post Office	**252,879**
B. POST OFFICE	**246,078**
C. SERVICE AND SUPPLY DEPARTMENTS:	
Admiralty	33,765
War Office	39,441
Air Ministry	26,536
† Ministry of Supply	33,850
* Other Departments in this Group	831
TOTAL FOR SERVICE AND SUPPLY DEPARTMENTS	**134,423**
Grand Total for all departments	**633,380**

Note: These figures are taken from Cmd. 9400.

Industrial staffs are excluded throughout.

Part-time staffs are included—two part-timers being reckoned as equivalent to one whole-timer.

* Departments with staffs totalling less than 2,000 on 1st January, 1955, have been included in these totals, and are not shown separately.

† That part of the Ministry of Supply staff engaged on civil work has not been assessed separately. The whole staff is shown under Part C.

APPENDIX THREE

The Administrative Class

DUTIES

The duties of the administrative class include the formation of policy, the co-ordination and improvement of Government machinery and the general administration and control of the Departments of the public service.

NUMBERS AND PAY

The permanent staff in this class are divided into the following grades:

	Numbers at 1.7.53			*Pay*	
	Men	*Women*	*Total*	*Men*	*Women*
				£	£
Permanent Secretary to the Treasury	1	—	1	5,000	—
Permanent Secretary	33	—	33	4,500	—
Deputy secretary	67	1	68	3,250	3,250
Under-secretary	210	7	217	2,500	2,325
Assistant secretary	676	27	703	1,600–2,100	1,423–1,950
Principal	1,171	109	1,280	1,150–1,570	1,025–1,395
Assistant principal	257	35	292	470–855	470–750
Total (see note (iii))	2,415	179	2,594		

Note: (i) The scales are those relating to staff in London at 1st July, 1953.

(ii) Some heads of smaller departments are graded as deputy secretary.

(iii) The class includes three principal assistant secretaries on £2,125 and seventy other officers on various rates.

HOURS AND LEAVE

Most administrative staff are employed in offices working a 45½ hour, 5½ day, week at present.

Members of the class are normally allowed thirty-six days' leave rising to forty-eight after ten years' service. This allowance is at present restricted to thirty-six days.

Source: *Introductory Factual Memorandum on the Civil Service.*

APPENDIX FOUR

The Executive Class

DUTIES

The duties of the executive class lie between those of the clerical class and the administrative class. They may be summarised as the day-to-day conduct of Government business within the framework of established policy. They include, however, supply, finance and accounting work and other specialised work, e.g. the assessment of taxes, not requiring professional qualifications.

NUMBERS AND PAY

Permanent staff in this class are divided into the following grades:

	Numbers at 1.7.53.			*Pay*	
	Men	*Women*	*Total*	*Men*	*Women*
				£	£
Heads of Major Establishments	32	—	32	2,500	—
Principal executive officer	123	—	123	1,600–2,000	—
Senior chief executive officer	257	3	260	1,408–1,562	1,229–1,408
Chief executive officer	702	18	720	1,260–1,510–	1,090–1,335
Senior executive officer	2,585	180	2,765	1,030–1,230	900–1,060
Higher executive officer	7,615	1,371	8,986	830–995	710–860
Executive officer	17,535	5,762	23,297	290–800	290–675
Total	28,849	7,334	36,183		

Note: (i) The scales are those relating to staff in London at 1st July, 1953.

(ii) In addition to the staff shown above, there are some 28,000 established departmental executive staff, mainly in the Inland Revenue and the Ministry of Labour, whose pay is very closely related to that of the general class.

HOURS AND LEAVE

A 5½ day week is the general rule. The actual working hours of the large majority of the class are 45½ hours a week at present.

Executive officers are allowed thirty-six days leave. Higher executive officers and above are entitled to thirty-six days leave, rising to forty-eight after fifteen years service in grades carrying thirty-six days; this allowance is at present restricted to thirty-six days.

Source: *Factual Memorandum.*

APPENDIX FIVE

The Clerical Class

Description and Duties

The clerical class comprises the general clerical class and some 30,000 members of the departmental clerical grades whose pay, since the war, has followed more or less automatically on that of the clerical grades. The main surviving departmental clerical grades are Inland Revenue tax officers, Ministry of Labour grade six officers and Customs and Excise departmental clerical officers. The general clerical class consists of two grades—the higher clerical officer and the clerical officer. There are also some 55,000 temporary clerks, most of whom perform duties slightly less difficult than those of clerical officers.

Higher clerical officers are in charge of clerical staff in certain establishments and this supervision is usually the whole or main part of their duty, for example in registries. The rest of their duty is case-work. The clerical officer grade, the largest general service grade, is employed on a wide range of duties. Clerical officers perform all the simpler duties not allocated to clerical assistants (see Appendix Six); deal with particular cases in accordance with well-defined regulations, instructions or general practice; scrutinise, check and cross-check straightforward accounts, claims, returns, etc., under well-defined instructions; prepare material for returns, accounts and statistics in prescribed forms; undertake simple drafting and precis work; collect material on which judgments can be formed; and supervise the work of clerical assistants. Some members of the grade are designated clerical officer (secretary). They perform secretarial work, including shorthand and typing, for senior officers.

Numbers and Pay

The numbers and salaries of the permanent staffs in this class are as follows:

	Numbers at 1.7.53			*Pay*	
	Men	*Women*	*Total*	*Men*	*Women*
				£	£
Higher clerical officer	1,633	847	3,480	655–800	530–675
Clerical officer	51,153	26,260	77,413	170–570	170–460
Clerical officer (secretary)	15	1,284	1,299	170–570	170–460
Total	52,801	28,391	81,192		

Hours and Leave

The great majority of the class works a 5½ day, 45½ hour week at present.

The leave allowance of clerical officers is twenty-four days, and that of higher clerical officers, thirty-six days, a year.

Source: *Factual Memorandum.*

APPENDIX SIX

Clerical Assistant Class

DUTIES

Clerical assistants perform simple clerical duties of the kind commonly performed during the war, and to some extent still performed, by temporary clerks. These may be summarised as routine duties up to and including the preparation, verification and scrutiny of straightforward documents, statistics, records, etc., the preparation of other documents, subject to check; simple arithmetic calculations, with or without the aid of office machinery; the simpler forms of registry work; simple correspondence of the stock letter and printed form type under well-defined general instructions; the operation of office machines. This is a description rather than a rigid definition, and other similar duties may also be assigned to the class. The higher ranges of clerical assistant duties overlap with the lower ranges of clerical officer duties.

NUMBERS AND PAY

The class is wholly an established one. The numbers and pay are:

	Men	*Women*	*Total*	*Pay* *Men*	*Women*
Clerical assistant	11,138	17,320	28,458	£3–£8 8s.	£3–£8 8s.

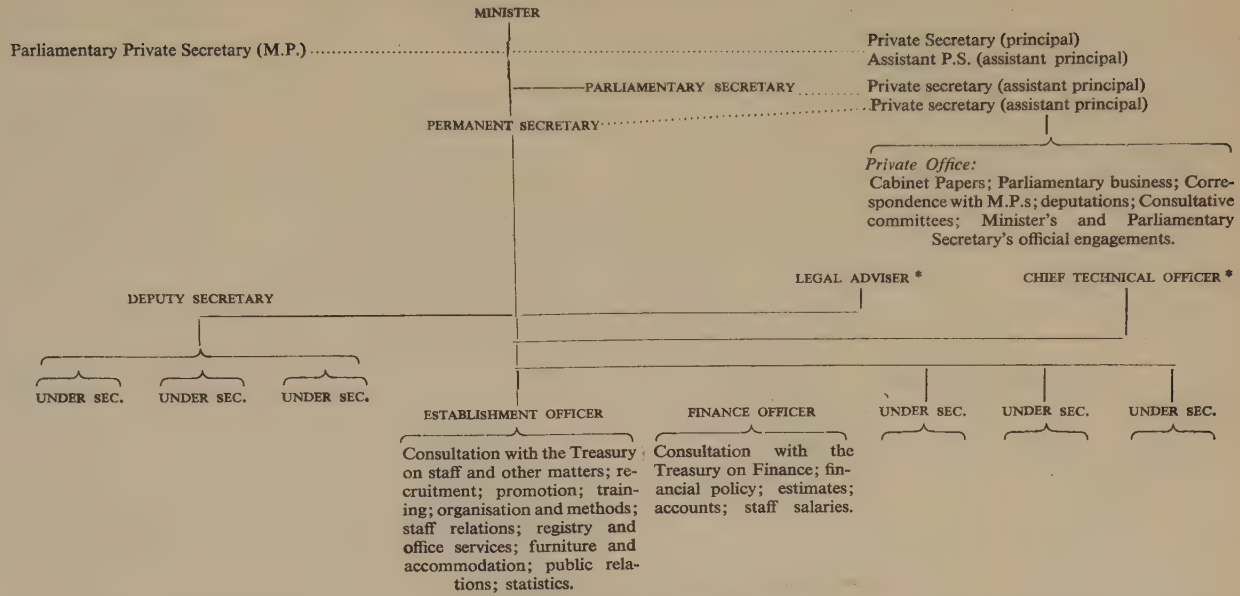
LEAVE

Clerical assistants are allowed eighteen days leave rising to twenty-one days after five years service.

Source: *Factual Memorandum.*

APPENDIX SEVEN

Top-Structure of Medium-sized Social Service Department

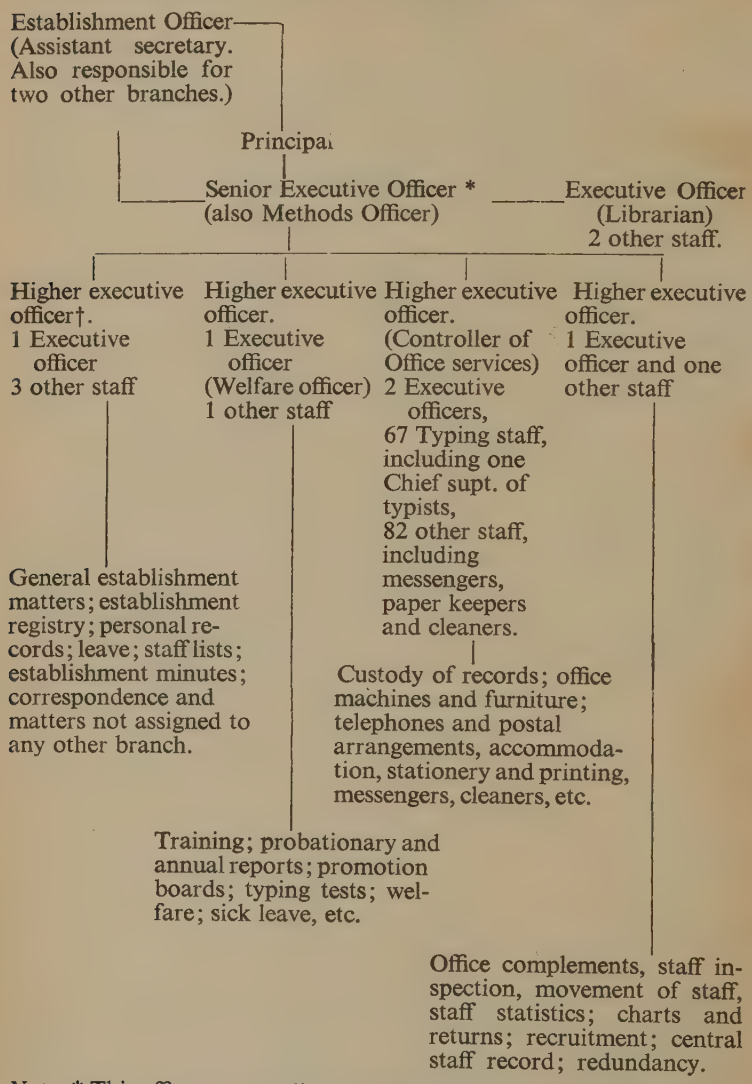


Note: Each under secretary will take references from a small number of assistant secretaries or officers of roughly equivalent rank. The subject matter will of course vary from office to office, except in the case of the Establishment Officer and the Finance Officer, whose responsibilities will generally include those shown in this diagram.

* These officers will usually be assisted by professional or technical officers of various grades. Their subordinates will, generally speaking, report to them on professional or technical matters and to administrative officers of appropriate rank on other matters.

APPENDIX EIGHT

Establishment Branch of a Small Government Office



Note: * This officer reports direct to the Establishment Officer on certain matters, but, in the main, assists and deputises for the principal in charge of the branch.

† This officer acts as secretary of the Departmental Whitley Council.

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